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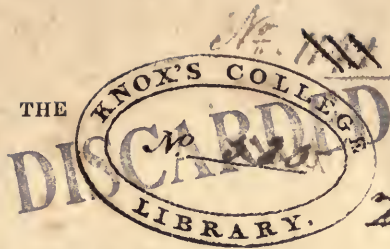


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THE
FALL OF NINEVEH.

G. WOODFALL, ANGEL COURT, SKINNER STREET, LONDON.



FALL OF NINEVEH,

A POEM.

BY

EDWIN ATHERSTONE.

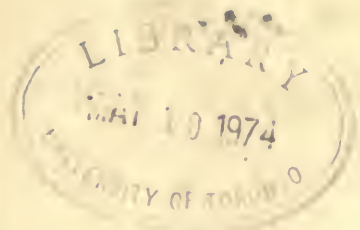
THE FIRST SIX BOOKS.

Presented by General Mc Donnell C. B.

LONDON :

PRINTED FOR BALDWIN AND CRADOCK.

MDCCCXXVIII.



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TO THE MASTER-SPIRIT OF THE AGE,

TO THE LIVING SHAKESPEAR,

TO SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

THIS PORTION OF

The Poem

IS, WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT, INSCRIBED.



PREFACE.

OF the history of the great Assyrian Empire, little is with certainty known. The bewildering antiquity of its origin,—the immensity of its dominion,—the splendour and gigantic bulk of its cities,—and the utter desolation that, for long ages, has overspread them, invest the subject with the character of a magnificent dream. Yet that such cities as Nineveh and Babylon have existed, and with a grandeur perhaps never equalled, we cannot but believe. The ashes still remain to prove that the Titanic forms have been; and surely the contemplation of their glory, and their destruction, cannot be idle; nor, to the sons of the richest and the proudest of existing empires, the least peculiarly interesting. Of the rise and the fall of this mighty power a brief history will be found among the Notes at the end of this volume.

The character of Sardanapalus, as given by

most historians, is utterly worthless : not unfit for the hero of an epic poem only, but even for the monster of the most prosing fable.

His recorded *actions*, however, are inconsistent with the disposition and the qualities attributed to him. We see no creatures half lion, and half goat. He may have been effeminate, timid, slothful,—but could not also have been bold, decisive, active, and warlike. He may have indulged to excess in sensuality,—but could not have been the drivelling, disgusting, idiotic sensualist : he may have painted his checks, and attired himself as a woman,—but must have had within him the energies of a man. The Samson slept in the lap of Dalilah,—but his locks were not shorn. From the pleasures of wine and love, music and feasting, he arose to lead armies to the battle ;—with desperate valour fought at their head,—three times triumphed ; returned to the banquet,—to love and to wine : —was surprised—hideously routed,—still to the uttermost resisted,—and, when at last totally vanquished, boldly and deliberately put himself to death.

In the deep obscurity of his history these alleged facts decide the opinion that I form of him.

The Sardanapalus that I have chosen to exhibit, is a character not unsupported by parts of the incongruous elements left by the historians, and may therefore be not violently objected to by even severe sticklers for historic accuracy : he is of a class with which we may unblamed be allowed to sympathise,—a man of good and evil mingled : one that, in other circumstances, and under wiser tuition, might have been great and virtuous : whose ungovernable fury might have been a generous enthusiasm,—whose all-devouring sensuality might have been ardent, devoted love,—whose unrelenting tyranny over others might have been stern self control,—whose implacable resentment against rebellion might have been heroic resistance against oppression. He has within him a fire that, wisely tended, might have given warmth and splendour, and enjoyment ; but which, uncontrolled, becomes a conflagration that consumes him. Such is the character that I have attempted to delineate.

In the *costume*, (comprehending under that

word all that is peculiarly appropriate to the age, and the country ; to the manners, customs, and dress of the people,) I have not, I trust, been grossly incorrect. If it be not strictly and severely Assyrian, and antique, it is not, I hope, European, or modern.

As it appears to be generally known that this Poem has a connexion with my friend MARTIN'S magnificent Painting upon the same subject, and as misconceptions are gone abroad as to the nature and extent of their relation, I may perhaps be allowed to say that the Painting is not, as some have supposed, an illustration of any part of the Poem,—nor is the Poem, on the other hand, an exposition of the Painting. We agreed to work together, in our respective arts, upon the same subject, but to treat it each according to his own views and impulses. We have consulted together, and

disputed together,—but have trodden each upon his own path.

His work is done; and renown, justly earned, must follow it. Of my labour the greater portion is yet to come. I began much later, and have had less leisure, than he.

Whether public opinion may encourage me to complete the Poem, or warn me to desist from it, I cannot foresee: but of my friendship, and co-operation with an artist whose genius reflects honor upon our country, I shall always think with pleasure, and with pride.

But for his encouragement, and that of one other most esteemed friend, I should not, probably, after BYRON'S appropriation of it, have ventured upon the subject.

LONDON, MAY 5TH, 1828.

NAHUM.

CHAPTER I.

1. THE burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

3. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

4. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth.

5. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.

6. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

8. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies.

10. For while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry.

CHAPTER II.

1. HE that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily.

3. The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be as flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken.

4. The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall justle one against another in the broad ways : they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings.

6. The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved.

8. But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water : yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry, but none shall look back.

9. Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold : for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture.

10. She is empty, and void, and waste : and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness.

13. Behold I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn thy chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions : and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

CHAPTER III.

1. WOE to the bloody city ! it is all full of lies and robbery ; the prey departeth not ;

2. The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots.

3. The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear : and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses ; and there is none end of their corpses ; they stumble upon their corpses :

7. And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste : who will bemoan her ? whence shall I seek comforters for thee ?

11. Thou also shalt be drunken : thou shalt be hid, thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy.

13. Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women : the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies : the fire shall devour thy bars.

15. There shall the fire devour thee ; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm : make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts.

16. Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven : the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away.

17. Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are.

18. Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria : thy nobles shall dwell in the dust : thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them.

19. There is no healing of thy bruise ; thy wound is grievous : all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee : for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually ?



THE
FALL OF NINEVEH.



THE
FALL OF NINEVEH.

BOOK THE FIRST.

OF NINEVEH the mighty city of old,
The queen of all the nations,—at her throne
Kings worshipp'd, and from her their subject crowns,
Humbly obedient, held, and on her state
Submiss attended, nor such servitude
Opprobrious named—from that high eminence
How, like a star, she fell, and passed away,—
Such the high matter of my song shall be.
Theme antiquated, haply, deemed, and dull ;
Unseasoned in this gay and flowery age ;
Or else presumptuous ;—yet, well understood,
Not flat, nor profitless ;—nor without fear
By me approached, nor with o'erweening pride ;—
In silence pondered, and in solitude,

From busy cities far, and throng of men ;
By enemies untroubled,—and by friends,
Save few, uncheer'd : yet not with labour cold
Pursued, and mind depress'd ;—nor vainly quite,
So thou, Great Spirit, whatsoe'er thy name,
Muse, Inspiration, or Divinity,
Who the blind bard of Ilium didst support,
And him, yet favoured more, that Paradise,
Chaos, and Heaven, and Hell, in verse sublime
Sang to the solemn harp,—so sometimes thou
Wilt not disdain even me to cheer and aid !
Yet how should I invoke thee ?—how presume
To gaze upon the glory of thy brow ?
Even *they* perchance, the strong, the eagle-eyed,
Beholding thee grew dark,—how then might I
Upon thy splendours hope to look, and live ?—
But outward only was their sad eclipse ;
Intensely glowed the light divine within ;
Mine is the deeper midnight of the soul,—
Harder to bear :—yet, if one ray divine
Thou wilt vouchsafe, not wholly shall I fail ;
Not all shall I be earthly, cold, and dark !

The vision comes upon me !—To my soul

The days of old return ;—I breathe the air
Of the young world ;—I see her giant sons.
Like to a gorgeous pageant in the sky
Of summer's evening, cloud on fiery cloud
Thronging upheaped,—before me rise the walls
Of the Titanic city,—brazen gates,—
Towers,—temples,—palaces enormous piled,—
Imperial NINEVEH, the earthly queen !
In all her golden pomp I see her now,—
Her swarming streets,—her splendid festivals,—
Her sprightly damsels to the timbrel's sound
Airily bounding, and their anklets chime,—
Her lusty sons, like summer morning gay,—
Her warriors stern,—her rich-robed rulers grave ;—
I see her halls sunbright at midnight shine,—
I hear the music of her banquetings ;—
I hear the laugh, the whisper, and the sigh.
A sound of stately treading toward me comes,—
A silken wafting on the cedar floor :
As from Arabia's flowering groves, an air
Delicious breathes around.—Tall, lofty browed,—
Pale, and majestically beautiful,—
In vesture gorgeous as the clouds of morn,—
With slow, proud step, her glorious dames sweep by.

Again I look,—and lo! around the walls,
Unnumbered hosts in flaming panoply,—
Chariots like fire, and thunder-bearing steeds!
I hear the shouts of battle :—like the waves
Of a tumultuous sea they roll and rush!—
In flame and smoke the imperial city sinks!—
Her walls are gone—her palaces are dust—
The desert is around her, and within—
Like shadows have the mighty passed away!—

Whence, and how came the ruin? By the hand
Of the oppressor were the nations bowed;—
They rose against him, and prevailed: for he,
The haughty monarch who the earth could rule,
By his own furious passions was o'er-ruled:
With pride his understanding was made dark,
That he the truth knew not; and by his lusts,
And by the fierceness of his wrath, the hearts
Of men he turned from him. So to kings
Be he example, that the tyrannous
And iron rod breaks down at length the hand
That wields it strongest; that by virtue alone
And justice monarchs sway the hearts of men;
For there hath God implanted love of these,

And hatred of oppression, which, unseen
And noiseless though it work, yet in the end,
Even like the viewless elements of the storm,
Brooding in silence, will in thunder burst !
So let the nations learn, that not in wealth,
Nor in the grosser pleasures of the sense,
Nor in the glare of conquest, nor the pomp
Of vassal kings, and tributary lands,
Do happiness and lasting power abide ;—
That virtue unto man best glory is,
His strength, and truest wisdom ;—and that guilt,—
Though for a season it the heart delight,
Or to worse deeds the bad man do make strong,—
Brings misery yet, and terror, and remorse,
And weakness and destruction in the end :—
So if the nations learn, then not in vain,
The mighty one hath been, and is no more !

On NINEVEH'S proud towers the sinking sun
In cloudless splendour looks, nor through the earth
Like glory doth behold. In golden light
Magnificent the mighty city stands,
Empress of nations,—nor her coming doom

Aught feareth,—nor the voice of prophet old
Rememb'reth,—nor of her iniquities
Repenteth her,—nor the avenging hand
Of Heaven incensed doth dread;—but, with her pomp
Made drunken, and the glory of her might,
Her head in pride exalteth, and to fate,
As to a bridal or a dance doth pass.

The flaming orb descends: his light is quenched:
The golden splendours from the walls are fled.
Even so thy glories, mighty NINEVEH!
Shall darken, and impenetrable night,
On which no morn must rise, envelope thee!

But joyous is the stirring city now:
The moon is clear,—the stars are coming forth,—
The evening breeze fans pleasantly. Retired
Within his gorgeous hall, Assyria's king
Sits at the banquet, and in love and wine
Revels delighted. On the gilded roof
A thousand golden lamps their lustre fling,
And on the marble walls, and on the throne
Gem-bossed that, high on jasper steps upraised,
Like to one solid diamond quivering stands,

Sun-splendours flashing round. In woman's garb
The sensual king is clad, and with him sit
A crowd of beauteous concubines. They sing,
And roll the wanton eye, and laugh, and sigh,
And feed his ear with honeyed flatteries,
And laud him as a God. All rarest flowers,
Bright-hued and fragrant, in the brilliant light
Bloom as in sunshine : like a mountain stream,
Amid the silence of the dewy eve
Heard by the lonely traveller through the vale,
With dream-like murmuring melodious,
In diamond showers a crystal fountain falls.
All fruits delicious, and of every clime,
Beauteous to sight, and odoriferous,
Invite the taste ; and wines of sunny light,
Rose-hued, or golden, for the feasting Gods
Fit nectar : sylph-like girls, and blooming boys,
Flower-crowned, and in apparel bright as spring,
Attend upon their bidding : at the sign,
From bands unseen, voluptuous music breathes,
Harp, dulcimer, and, sweetest far of all,
Woman's mellifluous voice. What pampered sense,
Of luxury most rare and rich, can ask,
Or thought conceive, is there.

But, far away,

The proud and melancholy queen sits lone
In her high chamber, breathing the cool air
That fans in vain her hot, indignant brow.
She loathes the sensual monarch ; can not stoop
Her noble soul to share his orgies foul ;
Yet once hath loved him,—once hath been beloved ;
And now she thinks upon the years gone by,
And sighs, and sheds some passionate tears, and looks
On that gigantic city, spread below
Far as the eye can reach, and says, “ Alas !
Thou mighty city, am I queen of thee,
Yet desolate ? ”

Young Dara, flushed with love,
Through the perfumed shades steals fearfully
Of the proud palace gardens ; for his soul
Is with Nehushta, daughter of the king.
Along the broad, dim, moonlight dappled path,
Lightly trips he ; oft stops, and looks around ;
And flings his dark hair back, and listens oft.
She with two trusted maidens, in a bower
Fragrant with all delicious flowers that breathe
Their richness to the eve, impatient waits,

And blames the murmur of a fountain nigh
That drowns his stealthy footstep ; and oft looks
With eager eye along the chequered path,
And says—" Oh Dara--hasten to me, love !"—

Through all the city sounds the voice of joy,
And tipsy merriment. On the spacious walls,
That, like huge sea-cliffs, gird the city in,
Myriads of wanton feet go to and fro :
Gay garments rustle in the scented breeze,
Crimson and azure, purple, green, and gold :
Laugh, jest, and passing whisper are heard there ;
Timbrel, and lute, and dulcimer, and song ;
And many feet that tread the dance are seen,
And arms upflung, and swaying heads plume-crowned.
So is that city steeped in revelry.

Yet is the year of her destruction come !
For with a grievous hand the satraps ruled
The groaning nations ; while the sensual king,
In his vast palace, like a Deity,
Unseen by all, and inaccessible,
In one unbroken and voluptuous dream
Passed years away, and heeded not the cries

Of the oppressed,—nor for justice cared,—
Nor of his people thought but as of slaves
Created for his pleasures. But ere long
A solemn lesson waits him, learned too late ;
Unthought of now ; for all the East was his :
From Indus westward to the Hellespont,—
From north of Caspian to the Persian gulf,—
A host of nations whom no tongue could sum,—
All called Assyria lord ; and, year by year,
To giant NINEVEH new warriors sent
To grace her monarch's state, and guard his throne.
What should he fear ?—And yet his fate was nigh.

Witness unseen of that loose revelry,
Th' avenger of the wailing nations stands
This night within the hall, and silently
Obtests all ruling Heaven for chastisement.
Him to that place of grandeur and of guilt
By stealth to bring, a covetous slave he bribed ;
Beheld—and vowed the tyrant's overthrow.

Nigh to the palace, meantime, anxiously
Waiting his coming forth, a warrior stood,—
A man of stature noble. On his spear

One hand he rested ; in the other held
His golden helmet, that the cool night air
His brow might fan, while on the glowing heaven
Pondering he gazed. His countenance was pale,
Solemn, yet ardent, such as prophet of old
Might well beseem : round his broad forehead hung
His black locks clustering, and adown his neck :
And the majestic beard, depending low,
Marked him beyond the bloom, but in the strength
Of daring manhood. With the warrior's arms
The sable vestments of the priest he wore,
Soldier and priest in one. In battle brave,
In council eloquent, was he ; but chief
In the dark learning of Chaldea's seers
Deep skilled. The rise of empires, or their fall,
In solitude, and in the depth of night,
With awful eye he of the stars would ask,
And would believe. From him, in later years,
That proud one sprang, monarch of Babylon,
Nebuchadnezzar, who, of throne and wealth
Deprived, among the beasts his lodging found,
And of their food partook ; so arrogance,
And boundless power unchecked, of reason him
Bereaved, and to the beastly nature sank,—

Fit punishment ! But in the years to come,
An embryo yet, he slept : his sire, the while,
The soldier-priest, the prophet, and the sage,
Belesis, over subject Babylon,
Assyria's satrap, ruled ; but saw, not far,
The dawning of her glory, when no more
Should Babylon to mightier Nineveh
Tribute, and of her warrior sons the flower,
Submissive to th' Assyrian tyrant send :—
So in the stars read he the will of Heaven,
Undoubting ; but the signal, and the hour,
The chosen instruments, with anxious eye,
Still of the Gods inquired. The youthful prince,
From the long line of Median kings who drew
His birth, Arbaces, to his thought, at length,
The destined one appeared ; for round his brow
A glory was, and lightning in his eye,
And in his limbs heroic matchless strength,
Like his, the chosen Israelite of old,
Son of Manoah, Samson, who, scarce armed,
His foes by thousands slew ; and the huge gates
Of Gaza on his shoulders bore away,
Wide entrance showing to th' astonished foe,
When in the morning he looked forth, and saw

On the hill top the brazen portals stand—
Labour of many an hour for man and steed ;—
And, lastly, who in wrath the pillars shook
Of Dagon's roomy temple, and brake down ;
Upon himself and thousands of his foes
Death bringing, underneath the ruin crushed.
Such was Arbaces ;—on the Median throne
Who, by just right, had sat : but Media too
Of proud Assyria long had been the thrall ;
He but the leader of th' unwilling host
She to the tyrant sent. Him, on that day,
Belesis, with dark hint at first, and word
Ambiguous sounded ; and a spirit prompt
For noblest enterprise—so glory joined—
Found in him ; but his thoughts revealed not all ;
Desire awaking chiefly to behold,
In all his pomp, that mightiest of the earth,
Assyria's dreaded, unapproached king ;
That, in his weakness, he the man might know,
Whose terror shook the nations ; from his eyes
So might the scales fall off ; and in his heart
Disdain spring up of bondage ignorant.
Yet easy not the task, nor safe, the depths

Forbidden of that vast and gorgeous pile
With unpermitted foot to reach : and least,
Into its inmost heart, the secret place
Of kingly grandeur, and of kingly shame,
All seeing, yet himself unseen, to pierce.
But there the Mede is gone : and him the priest,
With anxious expectation, long awaits.

The palace gate at length wide open flies,
And, like a youthful giant, in bright arms
Comes forth th' heroic Mede. A cubit's height
In stature he the tall priest overtopped :
His tread was like a war-steed's in his pride :
And, as toward the unclouded moon he looked,
His countenance might sure some youthful God
Worthily image : yet upon it now
Sat shame and anger. Him to meet, the priest
Slowly advanced ; but with impetuous haste
Came on Arbaces, and, with flashing eyes,
His angry thoughts thus spake. " And is this he—
This drunkard—this effeminate—this thing
Man limbed, and woman hearted—is this he
Before whose throne a hundred nations bow ?

Their fetters shall be burst!—he shall not live!
 Even in the secret hour of his debauch,
 This hand shall slay him.”—

“ Hush ! No place is here
 For words like these”—the Babylonian said.
 “ Ill canst thou know thy destiny.—But come :
 Let us away unto the noiseless plains,
 Where stir of man is not, that of yon host
 Of heavenly ministers we may inquire,
 And know the fates aright.”

That said, in haste,
 Communing as they went, their way they take.
 They mount their chariot : thunder o’er the bridge,
 That spans broad Tigris : on the ample road,
 Palm bordered, swiftly urge their smoking steeds,
 Till, far behind, the mighty city’s roar
 Is but a hum ; and the gigantic walls
 Seem unsubstantial as a dream.

“ Enough !”
 The Babylonian said, and checked the steeds,—
 “ Here will we stay.”—Forth from the chariot then

Lightly they leap : the golden studded reins
To a strong fig-tree's branch securely tie :
A leopard's skin on either horse's flank
Throw heedfully ; then, grasping each his spear,
The broad road quit, and, o'er the dewy grass,
With quick steps take their way.

Not far removed,

Upon the summit of a hill there stood
A sacred grove, to the Chaldean Gods
For ages consecrate. Then spake the priest :
“ Abide thou here : alone must I converse
With those that rule the earth. Thy destiny
They will disclose ; and proud Assyria's doom.
The sacred rites thine eye may not behold :
Abide, therefore, below, and let thy thoughts
Be on the things to come.”—To him the Mede :
“ Go then ; and heaven be open to thine eye :
I will await th' event.”

The Priest withdrew.

Upon the summit of the hill arrived,
Amid the holy trees,—his falchion first,
And glittering spear upon the ground he laid :

His brazen helmet next, and shining mail :
Then, in his priestly vestments clad alone,
Fell prostrate on the earth. Uprising soon,
His arms he lifted, and his kindled eye
Turned towards the dazzling multitude of heaven,
And the bright moon. His pale and awful face
Grew paler as he gazed, and thus began :—
“ Look down upon us from your spheres of light,
Bright Ministers of the Invisible !
Before whose dread Supremacy weak man
May not appear : for what are we, earth-worms,
That the All-Holy One to us should stoop
From the pure sanctuary where he dwells,
Throned in eternal light ? but ye his face
Behold, and in his presence stand, and hear
His voice divine ; and his commands obey,—
Vicegerents of the sky. Upon your priest
Look down, and hear his prayer. And you, the chief,—
Bright Mediators between God and man,—
Who, on your burning chariots, path the heavens,
In ceaseless round,—Saturn, and mighty Sol,—
Though absent now, beyond the ends of earth,
Yet hearing human prayer,—great Jupiter,—
Venus—and Mars—and Mercury—O ! hear,

Interpreters divine ! and for your priest,
Draw the dark veil that shades the days to come !
Do not the nations groan ? Is not this land,
This proud Assyria drunken with her power ?
Yon giant city, where the tyrant dwells,
Is she not steeped in guilt unto the lips ?
Are not her women foul ?—her men debased ?
Is there, on earth, a monster like to him
That sitteth on her throne, and holds in bonds
Millions, and tens of millions, whose loud cry
Ascendeth daily to the sky for help ?—
And will ye then not help ?”

He paused, and gazed
Long time in silence on the starry host ;
His face like marble ; but his large dark eye
Lit as with fire : Then,—as upon him shone
Heaven opening,—and the vision of the years,
Shadowy, before him passed,—with hollow voice,
Broken and tremulous, “ I feel ye will—
I see the dark veil drawn—I see a throne
Dashed to the earth—I see a mighty blaze,
As of a city flaming to the heaven—
Another rises—and another throne—

Thereon a crowned one, godlike—but his face
With cloud o'er-shadowed yet—ha! is it thou?—
Hark! hark! the countless nations shout for joy!
I hear their voices like the multitudes
Of Ocean's tempest waves—I hear—I see"—

No more he spake: but, in a breathless trance
On heaven long gazing, sank at length, and lay
Senseless, and motionless.

The Prince, meanwhile,
Impatiently the coming of the priest
Long time awaited. To and fro walked he;—
Looked at the stars,—and pondered things to come,—
Thought on the past,—and on his country's fate,—
And on that hour when, in his mid debauch,
For vengeance on the tyrant he should rush.
He sees the death gasp on him—the alarm—
The rage—the fiery eyes—the thousand swords
Around him flashing:—but his own is forth—
Not idly dies he—heaps on heaps they fall
Beneath his desperate arm—the crowd gives way—
The gate is nigh—but ah! the death stroke comes!

He feels the hot blood in a torrent burst —
He sinks—he groans—he seems to pass away!—

But from that agony again he wakes:
Unto his distant home his thoughts take flight,—
The palace of his fathers: he beholds
His widowed mother, and his sister loved:
One mildly reverend; the other gay
In youth's bright morn, and sportive as a lamb:
And one, than all beside more dearly loved,
Before him comes,—one who, for him, all day
Sits melancholy; with pale check, and eye
Beaming on vacancy. A raven lock,
On her majestic shoulders that had waved,
He at his heart still wore; a curl of gold,
From his imperial brow, in happy hour
Transplanted, in her bosom fragrant grew.
He sees them looking for his glad return;—
He sees them when the tale of death is told:
He sees them rend their garments,—strew their hair
With dust and ashes,—and their cries he hears,
As, in the bitterness of grief, they lie
On the cold earth, and call on death to come.

But then he hears a million voices shout,
And send his name with glory through the earth:
Hamutah's pale cheek then with fervour glows:
His mother and his sister hear, and smile,—
And weep,—and honour him,—and look to Heaven,—
And bless him,—and lament him,—and rejoice.

Then passed that vision; and he stirred himself,
And looked toward the hill, and the dense grove,
That stood in massive darkness 'gainst the sky.
He saw no figure there,—he heard no sound:—
What held the priest so long? Far off, the voice
Of solitary lion came at times;—
A stir from the huge city, like the hum
Of bees, in nightly council, ere the day
When the young brood must take their flight:—a cry
Of lonely night bird, winging over head,
With slow, dull clang. He walked with hasty step,—
Paused,—looked again,—but yet the priest came not:—
He shook his ponderous lance,—his glittering sword
Half from the scabbard drew,—and sheathed again:—
What kept the priest?—He looked upon the sky:
The night was passing,—the grey dawn at hand:
“Some evil hath befallen the man”—he said,—

“ I will go up.” Half way he climbed the hill ;
 But on the summit saw the gleaming arms,
 And heard advancing feet. ‘Then to the priest,
 As he drew nigh,—“ What hath detained thee thus ?
 The night is almost spent : some ill I feared
 Had fallen upon thee.”

Nought the Priest replied ;
 But, coming up, before Arbaces fell,
 Prostrate, and cried—“ Oh, king! for ever live!
 May the king live for ever !”

“ Art thou mad ?”
 The Median said,—“ crazed with thy long night watch,
 And commune with the Gods ?—or dost thou mock ?”

But then Belesis rose upon his feet,
 And stretched his arms on high, and looked to heaven.
 “ Be witness for me, all ye dazzling host,
 If here I speak not that which ye decree !
 Nor mad am I,—nor crazed with long night watch,
 Or commune with the Gods,—nor do I mock.
 Thou, even thou, Arbaces, shalt o’erthrow
 Yon tyrant, and his sceptre dash to earth,

And grind his throne to dust : and thou shalt break
 The fetters of the nations, and wipe out
 The foulness of the land ; and shalt destroy
 Yon haughty city utterly with fire :
 And thou shalt sit upon Assyria's throne,
 And none shall shake thee from it : for even so
 It is emblazoned on the scroll of heaven,—
 The Eternal Ones have written it ! But come—
 Let us go hence. The time is nigh at hand ;
 We must not be found slumbering.”

A brief space

They walked in silence, till the Median thus :
 “ Strange things thou tellest me, O man of God !
 Passing almost belief : yet, in thy words,
 The image do I find of dreams long past,—
 Dreams, or foretokenings,—visions of the night,
 When judgment slumbers, and quaint fancy rules,—
 Or shews prophetic, may I rather say,
 Painting, as in a dim and dusky glass,
 The forms of things to be.”

To him the Priest.

“ Wo to the man that every idle dream
 Trusteth to find from heaven ! for he shall be

Uncertain as the winds that never rest ;
Unstable as the flitting mist of morn :
He shall rise up in joy, and sleep in grief ;
Resolve ; and re-resolve ; and change again ;
Come like a lion on, and, like a sheep,
Fly from his purpose: for our dreams are webs
That break beneath the dew-drop; but of rock
Should be the base whereon our deeds are built,
Or they will come to ruin. Not the more,
When favouring Heaven in sleep doth visit us,
Drawing aside the veil of things not yet,
And with its manifest finger pointing them,
Should we misdoubt, and call its visions dreams,
Fancies and idle fallacies : who feels
The hand of Heaven upon him, falters not ;
But to its bidding with a firm heart goes,
Through evil, and through good. Such dreams were
thine ;
For so hath Heaven confirmed them to my eyes,
In waking vision. Go, and prosper, then."

So they: and in the chariot lightly sprang,
And smote the pawing horses. Rapidly
The brazen wheels flew sparkling through the night ;
The proud steeds snorted, and the rough road rang.

Then in the bosom of the Mede arose
 Tumult of thought, design, and doubt, and dread,—
 Yet with a proud hope victor over all,—
 And to the Babylonian thus he spake :
 “ I will not doubt, thou favoured man of God !
 That Heaven through thee hath spoken its high will :
 What thou hast said I surely shall work out ;
 But yet the way is dark : I am but one,—
 And round the tyrant’s throne there stands a host
 More than the stars of heaven : how shall one arm
 Pluck down a throne so strong ? ”

To him the Priest.

“ The arm of God, though single, could this earth
 Crush in an instant,—quench the burning sun,—
 Unseat the stars, and make them fall like rain
 Into the ocean of eternal night!—
 What is the Assyrian’s throne ? Art thou not chosen ?
 And shalt thou not be taught ? The seventh morn hence
 Our year of hateful service will be spent ;
 New hosts will take our place. Toward the king
 Their hearts are cold. Go we to meet them then,—
 Thou to the Medes,—the Babylonians I :
 The Arabian monarch, like a naphtha spring,

Will of himself blaze out; and all the rest
At our combustion burn. For, when we stand
Before the chiefs of the reluctant hosts,
And bid them in the name of Heaven to strike
For freedom, and their country, and the world,
Think'st thou that Heaven will not confirm the call?
Will not their bosoms burn with instant fire?
Will not their swords leap out? their shouts ascend?
Hath Heaven not spoken? Shall it come to nought?"

To him Arbaces, glowing as he spake:

“ Through thee Heaven's voice hath spoken. As thou
sayest,
So shall it be. This day, throughout the camp,
Let us be active 'mong our chosen friends,
To this our great emprise inciting them,—
And, on the morrow, hence to meet the hosts.”

Thus talking, to the city they drew nigh.
'Twas silent now; and, for the giddy crowds
That filled the ramparts, a few lonely forms
Glided with lazy step. They cross the bridge:
To the low thunder of the rapid wheels
The huge walls murmur back: they enter not

The gates, that opened as the car drew nigh,
But, to the northward wheeling, seek the camp.
One long thin line of golden tinted cloud
Hung on the horizon as they reached the tents :
With pious reverence toward the kindling sky
Bowling, they worshipp'd the approaching God,
And the swift fading stars.

Nor, when they rose,
To needful rest retired they,—but all day
From tent to tent, with unabating zeal,
Went stirring up the bosoms of their friends
To that great enterprise : and when the sun
On the next morrow drove his chariot up,
And overpeered the earth, he saw their steeds,
Far from the city, smoking on their way.

BOOK THE SECOND.

FIVE times from east to west the god of light
O'er heaven's eternal pavement flaming trod ;—
The star-bespangled wheel of night five times
Upon its smooth unsounding axle turned ;
And the sixth morn arose. The watchmen then,
From the high watch-towers looking toward the east,
The distant mountain-tops all bright beheld
With restless flashings, like a sun-lit sea ;
And toward the western hills when they looked forth,
Their tops saw also, with yet keener shine,
As of a diamond crown bright quivering :
But, north and south, along th' unbounded plains
All yet was void. The seventh grey dawn came on.
Th' expecting watchmen listened to a sound,—

A low dull sound, as of the distant waves
Heard on the summit of a sea-girt rock
When no wind stirreth :—but, when rose the sun,
Lo ! all the plain, south, north, and west, and east,
Deluged with glittering arms, and flags unfurled,
Chariots bright flaming, and brass-harnessed steeds.

Then, in a moment, every sound was hushed ;
And toward the rising god all knees were bent
Of that unnumbered host ; all faces bowed
In silent adoration. When they rose,
They shouted, and the cry went up to heaven.

At once a thousand trumpets from the walls
Answered the shout : with brazen throats upturned,
On all sides round ten thousand spake again.

No sleepers now in NINEVEH ! Wide fly
Upon their roaring hinges the huge gates ;
The plains are covered with the joyous crowds ;
Manhood, and trembling age, and infancy,—
All are abroad, and hurry through the gates,
Or on the high walls throng.

From her lone couch,
After long hours of fevered restlessness,
When first the pale morn looked with dreamy eye
Upon the slumbering earth, the queen arose.
Close to the palace, in the city's midst,
A lofty mound, like to a mountain, stood ;—
Work of Semiramis, long ages back,
To honour Ninus, her loved lord and king,
Whose ashes slept beneath. The founder he
Of that great city, which from him took name ;
For when, victorious o'er unnumbered lands,—
From Egypt and Propontis stretching east
To Bactria, whose impassable hills awhile
Drove back the flood of conquest,—he returned,
Exulting in his might—" I will build up
A city,"—he exclaimed—" the like of which
On earth hath never been, and shall not be."
Then by the banks of Tigris he traced out
Its boundaries ; a three-days' journey round,
And oblong square its shape. A million hands
Toiled then upon the work. A hundred feet
He made the walls in height ;—in thickness such,
Three chariots on their summit, ranked abreast,
With amplest space between, might try the race.

Above the walls, and twice their height, arose
A thousand and five hundred warlike towers :
Of massive brass at every tower a gate.
The city with a like magnificence
He fashioned ;—palaces and temples huge ;
Fountains, and baths, and gardens high in air
Uplifted, where the cedar and the palm,
As on the mountain's top deep-rooted, waved
Their giant heads ;—and o'er broad Tigris threw
A ponderous bridge. Thus in his pride did he ;
And never since upon the earth hath been
A city like to his. But then he died ;
And was consigned to dust : and over him
This mound, for an eternal monument,
Semiramis upthrew. Above the walls—
Above the towers high soaring it arose ;
A beacon to the traveller far away,
Who there at morn the sun's first glory hailed,
And blest his latest beam at evening there.
Upon the top a rich pavilion stood,
Where, in the sultry hours, Assyria's king
To wanton in the cooling breeze oft went,
That still was stirring there, while NINEVEH
Drew fever breath below. A smooth firm path,

From base to summit, like a serpent's train,
Around the mountain coiled. Unnumbered shrubs,
And trees of graceful form, and every flower
That scents the eastern breeze, were planted there,
Making of that huge monument of death
A garden of delight.

To this the queen,
From her lone chamber coming, turned her eye,
And to her damsels thus :—" Now maidens haste,
While yet dawn peeps, that we may climb the mount,
And to the sun our morning worship pay.
And let your harps and soft-voiced dulcimers
Be ready, that sweet music with discourse
Grateful we may commingle, and the hours
Not uselessly, nor undelighted pass.
Nor let the sprightly timbrel be forgot ;
That haply, if the tale or song be hushed,
The music of the graceful-gliding foot,
With no unwise variety, may charm.
But haste ye, for the stars begin to pale
Before the flashing of his coming eye,
And the gay birds are up to sing him in."

Thus speaking, a cerulean mantle first,
Wide flowing, airy as the gossamer,
Round her fine shoulders, with majestic grace,
The royal dame disposed, and on her breast
With clasp of pearl and ruby lightly bound ;
O'er her dark tresses next,—all unadorned
Save in their own luxuriant loveliness—
And o'er her pale and melancholy face,
Augustly beautiful !—a rich veil threw ;
'Then, with her damsels,—graceful as love's queen,
Majestic as the imperial spouse of Jove,—
Forth from the palace walked, and the steep mount
With slow step 'gan to climb.

Above the hills

Flashed the first sun-spark as its height they gained.
Lowly, in reverence to the God they bowed,
And breathed apart their orisons devout.
The golden orb in the blue crystalline,
As they arose, with majesty supreme
Upsoaring they beheld ; and all the plains
With fiery splendours from the countless hosts
Beneath his radiance burning : and the shouts,

The trumpet clangours, and the cymbal clash
They heard,—and from the city the reply,
The shouts, the clashing, and the trumpet's blare.

That sudden uproar, at his late debauch,
With drunken joy Sardanapalus heard,
The signal hailing,—and with loud voice thus :
“ Haste !—Salamenes summon to the king
His sun is risen,—though ours not yet gone down.
What ! my bright goddesses ! dim-eyed and dull ?
And would you slumber on your golden thrones
When your great Jupiter is going forth
To see his prostrate world ?—Awake ! awake !
No sleep to-day ! no drooping lids to-day !
To-day I'll be the god of all this earth ;
And you shall shine around me as the stars
About the full-orbed moon. Haste,—clear your brows,—
Speed to the bath, and cleanse these night-stains off,—
Then to the mount : Assyria's king to-day
Is monarch of the world ; and ye shall see
The countless nations at his throne bow down.”

Thus to his concubines ;—but different thus,
To Salamenes,—entering as he spake.

"What! armed already?—Art thou early up,
 Or not abed like us?—Nay, answer not—
 Thy cool, clear eye speaks for thee:—but thy brow
 Somewhat methinks too solemn is, and stern.
 Thy sister 'tis that turns from me thy heart:
 But more her pride, and o'er-nice prudery,
 That would in peasant's fetters bind a king,
 Should meet thy blame, than my abated love:
 By heaven! even yet I love her,—and more could,
 But to my wooing she is deaf as earth,
 And colder than a sepulchre."—

To him

The noble Salamenes, bowing, spake.
 "I stand not here as judge upon the king.
 The queen, my sister, her own counsel keeps,
 And griefs, if such she have. If over-nice,
 And fancifully proud, the fault is hers,
 And hers the pain. The will of kings holds not
 In limits that content the herd of men:
 This should she know; and arm her to endure:
 But there's a recklessness that scorns all bounds,
 'Fore which to bend, is to deserve the wrong:
 This should she never know; for, on the earth,

Lives not a woman nobler, or more pure—
 My sister though she be, I say it aloud—
 Than your once-loved Atossa.”

Him the king

Thus answered quick. “Once loved—sayst thou?—
 by heaven!

I tell thee—but ’tis folly all—no more!—
 No more—our brother, and sage counsellor—
 But mark me now. The armies are at hand:—
 Send thou swift horse; and unto both the hosts,
 Both those who come, and those who homeward go,
 This our high will make known. For four days’ space
 Let them unite, and round the city march;
 Nation with nation, let them be arrayed,—
 Chariots with chariots,—horse with horse,—and foot
 With foot;—and the musicians of both hosts
 Be gathered in one body in the midst:
 And when upon the mount they shall behold
 The waving of Assyria’s royal flag,
 Then shall they know the king o’erlooks the plain:
 Then let the trumpets burst their brazen cheeks,
 And every warlike instrument speak out;

And let all voices shout unto the heavens,
' Long live Sardanapalus, king of kings !
May the king live for ever ! ' So all eyes
Shall see the greatness of Assyria's might,
And tremble at her anger. The chief rule
O'er all the hosts I give into thy hands :
Away ! and as I will, so be it done."
'That said, the signet, symbol of his power,
He to his brother gave ; rose then, and went.

But Salamenes unto all the hosts
From out the four great gates swift horsemen sent,
The mandate of Assyria's lord to bear ;
'Then to the camp in haste, with darkened brow,
And thoughts but ill at rest, himself repaired.

The king meantime, with wine and sleep oppressed,
Upon his bed unwillingly sank down
In long and heavy slumber. Starting then
From some foul dream, upon his feet he sprang,
And called for wine, and bade the music speak
To stir his lazy sense. With haggard face,
Flushed eye, and aching head, and limbs unstrung,

Then to the bath he went. The crystal stream
 Received a heated drunkard, and gave back
 A man refreshed and cool.

In gorgeous robes

Attired soon, and in a chariot placed,
 Up the high mount he drives. With song and sound
 Of harp and psaltery, before him go
 Fair youths, his servitors; and in his train,
 With laugh and dancing step, like spring flowers gay,
 All griefs forgot, his beauteous concubines.
 From his meridian height day's lustrous god
 Downward 'gan take his way, ere on the top
 The panting horses stood. With heart elate,
 O'er all the plain the monarch cast his eye,
 Exulting in his glory and his strength;
 And thus, unconsciously, aloud. "Brave sight!
 What nation on the earth is like to this?
 What city with this city may compare?
 What king is equal to Assyria's king?
 How do the nations wait upon his nod!
 How do the souls of men bow down to him!
 Surely this kingdom shall for ever last!
 Surely this mighty city shall be queen

Of all the earth for ever ! What can shake
 Her throne, or dim the brightness of her crown ?
 Even as the lion o'er the desert rules,
 So o'er the prostrate world Assyria,—
 So o'er Assyria I !”

As thus he spake,

Lo ! with her damsels, the majestic queen,
 His eye to shun, retiring. At a bound,
 That seen, from out his chariot leaped the king,
 And, toward her hasting, spake. “ Why fly me thus ?
 Turn with me now and look upon these hosts
 Who here do homage to Assyria's king,—
 To thee through him ; for art thou not my queen ?
 Proud as thou art, and scornful, yet, by heaven,
 My heart cleaves to thee. Clear that clouded front ;
 Dismiss thy damsels, and a little while
 Let us in soft discourse the moments pass ;
 For on our bridal morn not warmer love
 I felt for thee than now.”

His words the queen

With face averted heard, and thus replied.
 “ Then was it love when, in thy innocent youth,

With heart all open, and with soul all fire,
Thou didst breathe forth, and blush to give it breath,
Prince as thou wert, and high above my sphere,
The simple story of thy kindling heart.
I loved thee then,—with many faults I loved,—
I clung to thee,—for yet I cherished hope ;—
But thou art fallen, for ever fallen now !
As east from west, so henceforth thou from me
Must be parted, never more to meet !—
Happy for thee were I the sole estranged !
King of Assyria, thou art mighty now ;—
Look well that treason underneath thy throne,
Work not to cast thee down. On yonder plain
Two million tributary swords are thine ;—
Let not thy reckless deeds against thee rouse
What for thy power and glory else had stood
Immoveable. Beneath thy satraps' rod
The people writhe ; yet to their cries thine ear
Is open never :—but in time beware !
Upon the brows of men do gather clouds ;
They talk in whispers, and their threatening hands
Touch on the sword-hilt. Like a God art thou
In glory above all ; but not thine own
The strength that makes thee glorious. What uplifts

Can also overthrow thee. Boundless power
Thou hast misused ; thy unbridled lusts
The hearts of men with hatred and revenge
Have filled against thee : maid nor matron now,—
Nor wife, nor widow, even in her grief,—
So that the fatal gift of beauty tempt,—
Is from thy spoilers free. The maid betrothed
Even from the altar thou hast snatched away,—
The blushing bride before her marriage night :
Nay—even the virgin sister of thy queen
Hath not thine eye incestuous dared to woo ?
And yet to me,—Oh shame ! thou talkest of love ?—
Farewell Assyria's king, and passion's slave !
When in the fire's embraces dwells the ice
Then I in thine ;—till then farewell."

So she ;

Nor looked again upon the king, but went
With graceful step majestic on her way.
She spake no word as down the hill she walked,
But her breast heaved ; and when her youngest boy
From out the palace to embrace her ran,
He wiped a crystal tear-drop from her eye.

Her, as she went, the king beheld ; and sighed ;
And, with remorse a moment touched, thus spake.
“ She says but truth ; debased I am and fallen ;
And her pure presence makes my foulness look
More hideously foul, that foolish shame
Falls on me, and I stand rebuked and awed,
Even like a tongue-tied clown. Oh ! happy days
Of youth and innocence ! for ever gone !
Can I not be again what once I was ?
Assyria’s crown I’d give to feel anew
That bliss I felt when in Atossa’s eye
I gazed the first, with eye as pure as hers.
How have I come to this ?—Unchecked—mised—
All means at hand—no power of self-control—
Bad leading still to worse—and worse on that—
Till now—but ’tis too late !—whatever thing
I am—that must I be ! the rotten log
Grows not again a green and healthful tree,
Nor can the heart once fouled turn ever pure !
Away—away—intruding thoughts—away—
Life is a dream—be mine a jovial one !
Wine—give me wine. Ha ! beauteous goddesses !
Lift up your voices, for my heart is dull ;

And put the brightest sun-light in your eyes,
For I am lost in darkness."

At the word,

Bending and twining in voluptuous dance,
The sparkling girls came on ; and, as they moved,
Sang out in cheerful chorus. He, the while,
From out a golden cup drained eagerly
A full and luscious draught ; then madly sprang,
With laugh and amorous gesture, to the dance ;
And gave his soul to mirth. " But hold"—he cried,—
Breathless, and heated,—“ are we here for this ?
The dance,—the song,—the feast we have each day ;
But this day, girls, Assyria's king is god
O'er all the earth ;—this mount shall be his throne,
And your bright eyes the jewels in his crown.
Look forth upon the plain, and see his might.
Lo ! from Bithynia, Lydia, Phrygia,
From Cappadocia, and Iberia,
Armenia, ancient Syria, Babylon,
From Media, Persia, and Arabia,
Chorasmia, Hyrcania, Aria,
Past the Salt Desert, past Gedrosia's waste,

On to the banks of Indus ; northward thence
From Bactriana to the Scythian wilds—
Full twice a hundred myriads of brave men ;
War steeds four hundred thousand ;—look, my girls !
All are to honor great Assyria's king—
In him to honor you. Bring forth the wine,—
A brimming cup to every goddess bring ;
And when the king shall drink, then drink ye all :
And then from every throat on yonder plain,
From every voice in mighty NINEVEH,
The long loud cry shall rise unto the heavens,
And own the king of kings,—the earthly God.”

He spake, and raised the goblet to his lips,
And poured the nectar down : and, when he drank,
His concubines drank also, every one ;
And joy was in all eyes. Then went the king,
Flushed with the wine, and in his pride of power,
Glorying ; and with his own strong arm upraised
From out its rest the Assyrian banner broad,
Purple and edged with gold ; and, standing then
Upon the utmost summit of the mount,—
Round, and yet round,—for two strong men a task
Sufficient deemed,—he waved the splendid flag,
Bright as a meteor streaming.

At that sight,

The plain was in a stir : the helms of brass
Were lifted up,—and glittering spear-points waved,—
And banners shaken,—and wide trumpet mouths
Upturned ;—and myriads of bright harnessed steeds
Were seen uprearing,—shaking their proud heads ;—
And brazen chariots in a moment sprang,
And clashed together. In a moment more,
Upcame the monstrous universal shout,
Like a volcano's burst. Up—up to heaven
The multitudinous tempest tore its way,
Rocking the clouds : from all the swarming plain,
And from the city rose the mingled cry,
“ Long live Sardanapalus, king of kings !
May the king live for ever !” Thrice the flag
The monarch waved ; and thrice the shouts arose
Enormous, that the solid walls were shook,
And the firm ground made tremble.

At his height,

A speck scarce visible, the eagle heard,
And felt his strong wing falter : terror-struck,
Fluttering and wildly screaming, down he sank—
Down through the quivering air : another shout,—
His talons droop,—his sunny eye grows dark,—

His strengthless pennons fail,—plumb down he falls,
Even like a stone. Amid the far off hills,
With eye of fire, and shaggy mane upreared,
The sleeping lion in his den sprang up ;
Listened awhile,—then laid his monstrous mouth
Close to the floor, and breathed hot roarings out
In fierce reply.

To martial music then
Moved on the mighty hosts, around the walls
Their four days' march beginning. But the king,
In the pavilion with his concubines,
Feasted all day beneath a canopy
Of purple, starr'd with emeralds and gold,
And every beauteous gem. From ruby cups,
And crystal bowls, and goblets of fine gold,
The sparkling wine they quaff'd ; and many a voice
Of sweetest tone to give them music breathed ;
And many an instrument, by cunning hand
Touched to excelling sweetness. All the day,
Drunken with pride and wine, there feasted he,
And thought not of the things that were at hand.

BOOK THE THIRD.

MIDNIGHT :—the gorgeous cavalcade is still :
The brazen helm is taken from the head :
From the tired limbs the gleaming armour loosed :
The chariot wheel stands motionless : the steed
Sleeps on the earth,—or his unfinished meal
Grinds drowsily ; and, with slow foot, the watch,
Much musing, saunters on his wearying round.

But in Arbaces' tent the chiefs are met
In secret council. Leaning on their spears
They stand expecting who the first shall speak.
Then Abdolonimus before the rest
Stood forth ; for of impatient mood was he,
Fiery and quick, his sinewy form to match,
And roe-buck lightness. On Arabia's throne,—

But vassal still of haughty NINEVEH,—
Two years he sat, and fretted in his chains ;
Like the wild steed of his own deserts proud,
And spurning at control. With rapid step
Into the midst he walked, and thus began.
“ Our time so short, why stand we silent here ?
Or wait we for the dawn ? Who summons us ?
And what the business ?—Be it told at once,
That, or to deeds we may bestir ourselves,
If such there be to do,—or use the hours,
As nature teaches, for refreshing sleep ;
Seldom, I ween, more lacked.”

Belesis then

With step majestic went into the midst,
And thus began. “ The summoner am I,
O king ! and all ye chiefs ! thereto by heaven
Incited ; nor the counsel of wise friends
Unsought, and unapproving. Wholesome sleep
Is to the wearied body as our food,
Which wanting long, we die ;—but counsel sage
Is oftentimes as a shield of proof, snatched up
To ward off instant death. My words then hear,
Nor deem ill spent the time. To-night we rest

Secure, and unsuspected ; our main host,—
So, of a surety, by the favouring Gods
Permitted,—from the city most remote ;—
The mountains at our back, a safe retreat,
Either from fate of battle,—should that fall,—
Or as a fortress where, our cause proclaimed,
We may abide, inviting to our arms
The oppressed nations. What to-morrow's close
May bring, we know not ; but, of good, no hope
More than the present,—while, of evil, much
May well be dreaded,—and, in part, is sure :
For, though the slumbering tyrant be not stirred
By noise of our intent, which, spread so wide,
Cannot be long concealed ;—and though our friends
Doubt not, nor waver in the feverish hour
Betwixt the close design and open stroke,—
A proof for boldest hearts,—yet this mad march,—
The tyrant's senseless whim,—around the walls
Prolonged to-morrow, of our mountain-holds
Will rob us ; give us fetter'd to the sword,—
If such be drawn,—the Tigris at our back,
Impassable, save by one bridge,—though broad,
Yet, for our numbers, and the haste of flight,—
If such our fate,—a poor and narrow pass ;—

Before us the huge city,—on each hand
The enemy,—and our best comfort this,
That 'twas our proper folly sought the blow
Which wisdom warned us from. But should we 'scape
Undoubted, and the fourth day's march be done,—
What better hope remains for us than now ?
The mountain fastnesses will be less nigh ;
The ardour of our spirits, by delay
Cooled, and, in many, quenched ; no chance of good
More than is now,—of evil manifold.
Why pause we then ? Warriors ! I call on you :—
Lift up your banners with the morning light,
Nor let the sun again behold your shame ;
But, to the rising Glory when you pray,
'Then, praying, draw the sword ; and, in his eye,
Swear never more to give it peaceful sheath
While o'er Assyria rules the woman king,—
While o'er the east Assyria ! for I say—
And reverence ye the priest by heaven inspired—
The day of her destruction is at hand,—
Her king is given to death,—her walls to fire ;—
Her strength shall be as flax before the flame,—
Her glory shall go out,—her name alone
Shall live to tell the world that she hath been !

Hear warriors, and believe ;—your banners lift,—
And draw your swords,—and trust to heaven the event ! ”

He ceased ; and murmurs of applause were heard ;
But second, or opposer, none appeared,
Till, of the Babylonian host new come,
The chief, Almelon, stepp'd into the midst.
An aged man was he, yet firm of limb,
And with an eye unquenched :—but with his years
Came caution, and distrust ; a judgement cooled ;
An anxious eye forecasting still the event,—
The worst too oft foreboding. On the priest
He fixed his look, and, with slow utterance, thus :

“ Thy years Belesis fewer are than mine,
And thy experience less ;—for thee I knew
A tottering infant, playmate to my own,
My second child ;—in Bactria he fell,
Fighting the tyrant's battles ;—but the rest,—
Four valiant boys,—are here, for different fate
Destined, I ween ;—but let that pass :—thy years
Are less than mine, and thy experience less,—
Then listen,—though for wisdom and far thought
With thee I match not, as what other can ?

For from thy boyhood wert thou ever wise
Beyond man's wisdom :—nor inspired am I
Like thee to commune with the glittering Gods,—
Yet, for these grey hairs, listen to my words,
Which shall be few,—for I no speaker am,
As well ye know. Lift not your banners up
'Till the fifth morn shall come,—nor draw the sword ;
But let your purpose lie as in a sleep,
And none will wake it. What ! forget ye then
How few our numbers in this mighty host ?
'Two hundred myriads here that lift the sword,—
And draw the bow,—and fling the hissing lance ;
But, leagued with us, an eighth at most ;—the rest
Of yonder tyrant hirelings, who for gold,—
And gold within that palace is as dust,—
Will tread us to the earth, and count it sport,
Well waged for the slight task. Forget ye this ?
And know not that the fourth morn hence will see
One half this living deluge ebb'd away,
Never again to flow ?—What chance of ill,
Doubtful, can match this certainty of good ?
Then get ye to your quiet beds, and speak
No word of your intents ; but wait in peace
The fifth bright morn ; then lift your banners high,

And sound your trumpets till you burst the brass,
If so you will,—I caution you no more.
Ye have my counsel,—hear it not in vain.”

Almelon ceased, and thus the priest replied.

“ Thy years, old chief, we reverence, and thy words,
By sage experience matured, attend :
Yet unto error are the wisest prone :
Good counsel unto better must give place,
Without regard of venerable age,
Whereto obedience would we gladly pay,
Reason approving,—not in her despite :
Therefore in censure of thy cold advice
I ope my lips,—nor thou offence shouldst feel.
Warriors ! your cause is in the hand of Heaven !
It is decreed, and written in the book,
That ye shall triumph. Harken no cold doubts !
Draw but the sword, and stand upon the way ;
And, when the lion comes against you, strike,—
And he shall fall ! What ! think ye in yon host
No heart will burn when they shall hear the voice,—
No sword be drawn when they shall see the steel,—
No flag be lifted when the banner flies,
Calling the brave to arms ?—Oh ! doubt it not !

The rather far, by my advice, your flag,
With the first dawn of light, to heaven lift up,
Even that this living deluge is yet full ;—
Matter for hope to us far more than fear,—
For terror more than triumph to our foes :—
For think ye that on us alone will break
The fury of its billows ? all the wreck
Be ours ? and that the tyrant's breath shall roll
Hither, or thither, as his whim shall be,
The stormy deep, and feel himself no shock,
And dread no home recoil ? No ! let him loose
The winds, and ope the flood-gates ; greater might
Than his shall rule the tempest, once awaked,
And fling him like the surf before its waves !
Ye have my counsel also ; choose the best."

He ceased ; and many voices in applause
Were heard ; in censure many or cold doubt ;
That certainty was none.

As to the breeze,
Blowing unsteadily, and veering still,
The golden crop full charged to every gust
Doth bow ; to this hand some, and some to this,

That whence the master wind may not be told,—
Even so with thoughts conflicting were the chiefs
Divided, that which counsel swayed the most
Might not be said.

Then stood Rabsaris forth,
Speaking aloud, and all were hushed to hear.
The tyrant's deadly foe well known was he ;
Stern and vindictive ; nursing but one hope,
The hope of vengeance for his daughter wronged
By him, the sensual king ; his comrade once
In youth, and bosom friend ; for at the chase
Together, and together at the board,
And at the midnight revel still were they.
But youthful friendship to insatiate lust
Slight barrier ; for Azubah's growing charms
The monarch fired, that, with imperious hand,
Even on the morning of her marriage day,
And from her father's arms, and in the sight
Of the expecting youth, the maid he seized,
And to his palace bore : herself, the while,
Not all displeas'd ; for her stern father's will,
Against her own, a husband little liked
Sought to impose ; and in the king she saw,—

So with soft words and lover's looks he soothed,—
Her friend and kind deliverer alone.
Fond dream ! and quickly past ! With desperate hand,
The disappointed bridegroom his own sword
Turned on himself: but, with consuming rage,
Rabsaris on the wrongful ravisher,
Even in his feasting hall, his weapon drew :
Struck frantically at all that barred his way,—
Was seized,—thrown down,—chained, and to prison cast.
Then all men said that he should surely die :
His foes rejoiced ;—his friends estranged themselves ;—
His next of kin petitioned for his lands,
And thought his respite long : but him the king
Set free unharmed ; his forfeit wealth restored ;
But from Assyria, for his term of life,
An exile sent him, on that day to die
When the forbidden ground his foot should touch.

Defying fate ; to all but vengeance blind ;
And to his altered brow, and shrunken form,
For safe disguise confiding, had he come,
That long-due debt to pay for which alone
He lived, or cared to live. A nobler blow
Designed he heard ; then fearlessly his name

Proclaimed, and vengeance purposed : and with his
Full many a hand was clasped, and many a vow
Of deep revenge put up.

His tall, gaunt form,
Hoarse, hollow voice, sunk cheek, and burning eye,
Drew all men's gaze. Into the midst he went :
His long right arm, attention to invite,
Held forth, and thus began :—

“ Friends,—warriors,—hear ;
Hear me, Rabsaris, and in that name hear
The tyrant's mortal, unrelenting foe.
What though he gave my life,—he gave but then
A worse and longer during agony !
Death had been mercy when that deed—but no—
I 'll talk no more on 't—or at fitter time—
And with my dagger, not with idle tongue.—
Foul ! false ! accursed !—Hear me, valiant chiefs,
Together leagued in this most holy cause,—
Which may the good Gods prosper ! But not thus,
Among yourselves discordant, can ye hope
For other than disunion and defeat,
Shameful and fatal. Of your closer schemes

I have not questioned you : for me enough
Your foe and mine are one : yet did I deem
Some ruling counsel swayed you ; and some chief,
By all acknowledged leader, had been named ;
Of your great enterprise the head and soul :
But here I see all leaders,—followers none ;—
For every sword a voice ; prognostic dire !
For look but at the simplest things that live,
And they shall teach you prudent government :
The silly sheep will yet a leader choose,
For strength and courage nobler than the rest ;
And him they follow :—the industrious bee
Works not but at the bidding of its queen ;
Nor will the lank cranes take their yearly flight
Save with a leader to direct their course :
Saw ever ye a herd but at their head
Was one, their king ?—through all the world 'tis so ;
Yea in the heavens,—for round one ruling star
The dazzling host obedient ever moves,—
And the great system lasts, and shall for aye.
But what if each particular orb, too proud
To own allegiance, would its separate course
Choose out in heaven,—how think ye then the frame
Would hold together ?—star 'gainst star impelled,—

Horribly clashing,—the huge arch would fall,
 And crush this earth, and bury all that lives.
 Learn then of these ; and from among you him,
 The worthiest, wisest, bravest, choose ye chief ;
 Him follow, and obey,—so shall ye thrive :
 But, in disunion, perish ; with your deaths
 Giving the tyrant's scourge a keener lash ;
 His chains a heavier link."

He ceased ; and straight
 Through all th' assembly ran a sound confused ;
 And many a name of king or warrior good
 Was heard ; and many a glance was thrown around
 On leader of repute.

Belesis then
 Again stood forth ; and to Rabsaris first
 His speech addressed.

“ O man of many wrongs !
 Wise is thy counsel ; for, without the head
 To guide and rule, what matters strength of limb ?
 True strength in wisdom lies. Why toils the ox,
 Pricked to his labour by some puny boy ?

Why doth the proud steed bear upon his back
The stripling, or the woman,—his vast strength
And spirit to their weakness tamed and bowed?
And wherefore doth the mighty elephant
His huge knee bend at bidding of a slave,
Whom with one motion he might strike to death,
Or crush to nothing? wherefore but for this—
That in the weaker frame of man abides
That nobler strength of wisdom which doth awe
The meaner intellect; and the huge powers
Of things irrational, like mere machines,
Doth use; their vigour seizing for itself,
Even to their own subjection? As the beasts
Senseless were we, and fit to wear the yoke,
A chief refusing and controlling mind
Who to wise purpose should our strength direct;
Making of many thousand feeble arms
One irresistible. The untwisted flax
An infant's hand may take, and, thread by thread,
Snap easily what, in one band firm knit,
Had been a cable for some bulky ship
To outride the storm with. Like these fragile threads
Were we, by jarring counsels kept apart,
Nor in one band, beneath one rule, made whole;

But, bound together, shall have strength to pull
From its broad base this monstrous tyranny,
And rend the fetters that bind down the world :—
In a wise union doth such power reside.
Nor ignorant we of this ; nor madly proud,
Or jealous to the needful curb to yield :
For chains and darkness in a maniac's cell
Fitter were he than for a leader's place,
Who his own headstrong will would not submit ;
Or in the anarchy of many rules
Could hope for conquest. One sole chief must be.

““ But who amongst us for that fearful height
The worthiest ?’ ye ask—‘ for him we choose.’

““ Warriors! your captain is already chosen !
His name is written in the eternal book !
Heaven hath appointed him ! To him is given
Wisdom, and strength, and victory, and rule,
And glory through all earth. Among you here
Unknown he stands : but, when your flag is raised,
And of the universal host ye ask,
‘ Whom for your captain choose ye ?’—then the shout
Shall to the heavens fly up and tell the gods,—

‘ Even so your will is done !’ What now remains
Is that ye say if with to-morrow’s sun
The glorious work commencement bold shall have,
Or till the fifth morn timorously wait ;—
Unhappy omen ! But at once now choose,
Nor longer in debate the time consume,
For quickly wastes the night. Who think with me
To this side draw ; who to Almelon lean,
Stand on the left ; and let one chief remain
To tell the numbers ; so shall soon be known
What counsel sways the most ; and that rule all.”

Such words pleased well ; and forthwith on each side
To range themselves they moved.

Th’ Arabian king
Then thus aloud, “ No chieftain have ye named
To count the numbers : be Arbaces he,—
For of a royal race the youth is sprung,—
Noble and brave,—and will the truth report.”

The rest his voice approved ; and in the midst
Arbaces stood, awaiting till the stir
Should be subsided. Then from rank to rank

He walked, and counted. Not a breath was heard.
 Twice round he went, and twice the numbers summed ;
 Then in the space betwixt both parties stood,
 And thus began.—

“ Friends, warriors, and allies !

Brave all, and earnest in this holy cause,
 Howe’er to counsels different inclined ;—
 Fair room for contest, since the bravest judge
 Not all alike ;—in equal poise the scales
 Stand balanced ; man for man on either side
 Exactly numbered : but myself not yet
 Have taken place ; my right to choose not lost.

“ On either side the brave, the wise, the good,
 The aged, the young, I see, in equal parts
 Justly divided ; question nice and deep
 That thus can part opinions ofttest joined ;
 And how shall I, a raw and unproved youth,
 Presumptuous on such matter arbitrate—
 Upon my shallow ignorance taking that
 Which age and wisdom doubt on ? Yet to me—
 So have the ever glorious gods ordained,—
 To me,—unworthy as I am,—is given,

The scales where mightiest events are poised,
To either side to sway. How choose I then ?
Ask I the brave ?—On either hand the brave
Invite me equally : the wise ? the good ?
The aged ? or the young ?—They call me here,—
They call me there,—with potency alike.
Of my own wisdom shall I counsel seek ?
Gravely this mighty question every way
Turn, and return, and learnedly debate ;
Then, like a judge between two counter claims,
Your difference set at rest, approving one ?
Foolish that man, and over proud at heart,
Who, with my years, and uncompelled, could stand
In this assembly supreme arbiter ;
Above such wisdom his raw ignorance
Esteeming sovereign : none such am I ;
And, lacking better guide than my poor wit,
A voice decisive would have blushed to give
Where such as these are balanced : but I ask
Not of the brave,—not of the young, or aged,—
Not of the wise,—nor of my own vain thoughts :
A mightier voice within my bosom calls,
Louder than armies,—and I must obey,—
For 'tis from Heaven it comes ! Oh ! falter not !

Your arms are on your limbs,—your hearts are strong,—
 Your cause is holy,—God is on our side,—
 How can you doubt?—Up with your banner,—up!
 Wait not the fifth pale morn;—wait not an hour!
 This instant let me plant before the tent
 The glorious standard!—Oh! to see it wave
 Beneath the myriad dazzling eyes of Heaven,
 Will nerve your arms, and lift your spirits up,
 To laugh at dangers, and make court to death!
 Have I your voices?—shall I plant the flag?
 Heaven bids you onward now: Oh! waver not!”

Thus he; and toward the folded gonfalon
 Eagerly pointing, two swift strides advanced;
 Then stood, and round th' assembly shot his eye,
 Bright as a meteor, waiting their approval.
 A noble glow was on his youthful brow:
 His form heroic with unearthly strength
 Seemed to expand: his voice was like the call
 Of trumpets to the battle: in their hearts,
 All said—“ behold our leader!”

As a torch,

To the cold, silent, moveless pile applied,

With its small flame the dead and heavy mass
To instant light, and fire, and motion turns,—
Dazzling the eye, and roaring in the ear,—
So, at his burning words, the sleeping fire
In the still bosoms of the generous chiefs
Burst to an instant flame. “Up!—up!”—they cried—
“Lift up the banner!—we will trust in Heaven!”

As on his prey the hungry lion springs,
So on the flag Arbaces. Hurrying then
Without the tent, the ensign in his hand,
And the applauding captains crowding round,
Into the earth with giant strength he drove
Deep down the quivering banner staff, steel shod,
Tall as a mast. Loud rustling to the wind,
The monstrous pennon shook its silken folds,—
Waving defiance,—beckoning to the field.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

ALL night there was a stir throughout the camp
Of the revolted nations ;—tread of feet,—
And clink of arms,—and earnest whisperings :
And many a horseman, spurring hastily,
Amid the Phrygian tents, far off, was seen,—
The Lydian,—and Armenian,—wheresoe'er
Was known the Assyrian's foe.

But now the sun
Flamed in the orient, and the ominous flag,
Amid the Median camp high eminent,
Struck on all eyes. Then was confusion strange,
And trouble in men's hearts : for, with the sound
Of trumpets, all around the banded hosts
Of Media, Babylon, and Arabia,

Went heralds with loud voices summoning
The nations to the standard of the free.
There was an uproar like the storm-swept deep :
Arms were snatched up, and helmets donned in haste ;
Steeds to the chariots harnessed,—standards raised.—
“ Death to the rebels !” here the myriads cry ;—
“ Death to the tyrant !” there. With looks aghast,
Here, toward the city anxious horsemen speed,
Proclaiming black rebellion broken out ;—
There, toward the Median camp, from every side,
Shields braced upon the arm, and falchions drawn
For instant contest, thousands hurry on,
Filling the air with cries, and joyous songs
To liberty : and many a charioteer
In his swift whirling chariot stands erect,
Waving his plummy helm, and pointing on.

That uproar, as beside his tent he knelt
In morning worship, Salamenes heard.
Rising, he looked around ; and lo ! the flag,
The emblem of rebellion, flaunting wide,
Portentous as the train of blazing star
That threatens plagues to man ! Aloud he called,
Smiting his breast ; and at the voice came forth

Nebaioth from the tent. “Behold! my friend—
Haste—haste—and blast thine eyes!—rebellion wakes;—
Away!—away! a herald take,—and speed,—
Speed for thy life!—demand what means this stir,—
And who their leader: bid them break yon staff,
And cast aside their arms, and of the king
I will myself, upon my knee, implore
Their undeserved pardon—Haste—pause not
To answer—I unto the king will fly:—
Yet stay—my signet take—and, where thou goest,
Bid every chief his squadrons draw away,
And camp before the walls,—so shall we know
The faithful from the recreant. Glorious God!
Shed not on traitors’ heads thy rays benign,—
But pour hot fire and phrensy in their hearts,—
And dry their blood, and wither up their strength,
That they may fall, and never rise again
To do their hellish will!” Speaking he ran;
And, in his chariot leaping, seized the reins,
And let the horses go. Along the plain
Swift as the wind they flew. Nebaioth then,
A herald calling, sprang upon his steed,
And spurred upon the way.

But in the camp
 Of Media, by the voice of heralds called
 To council, round their standard stood the chiefs :
 And, circling them,—even as the ocean flood
 Some little island rounds,—the expectant host,—
 A sea of glittering helms. Above them all,
 Bare headed, in his priestly robes attired,
 Upon a lofty car Belesis stood,
 Awaiting silence. When the stir was hushed,
 To heaven he looked, and lifted up his arms,
 Praying aloud, and spake.

“ Thou glorious sun !

And ye the bright Interpreters of Heaven !
 Invisible,—yet present still to prayer,—
 Your holiest influence now upon us pour :
 Our minds enlighten, and our hearts make bold :
 Let strength be in our arms, and in our breasts
 Union and brotherly love,—so shall our cause
 Go on triumphant, and the tyrant fall,
 And the chain'd nations break their bonds and live !
 But chiefly now, we pray, our counsels guide ;
 For this our great emprise a leader fit
 We ask of you.—Oh ! in this people's hearts

Let your dread voices speak aloud his name,
That all in him Heaven's chosen one may know,
And to his rule submit !”

He ceased, and bowed

His face to earth ; his arms upon his breast
Folded in reverence : but, rising soon,
Upon his brow in haste his helmet pressed ;
And thus aloud : “ Captains and warriors all !
Not now for wordy strife in long debate
We meet ; a harder contest waits us soon,—
Brief time for preparation. Who that looks
Upon this host can fear ? yet, like the sand
Before the whirlwind,—lacking wise control,—
Will all our might be driven. One head, one heart
Must guide us. Like the scattered drops of rain
That fall unfeared and powerless, is the host
Most numerous, whose every sword obeys
No leader save itself ;—but, like the cloud
That on a mountain bursts, and downward hurls
The rocky summit, crashing to the plain,
Amid the foam and roaring of its waves—
Such is the host whose myriad arms are knit
Into one giant arm, to one great blow,

Beneath one guiding mind. Then choose we now
A captain brave to lead the boldest swords,—
A counsellor to sway the wisest fit,—
And let him be our chief; and to his sway
Here vow we all obedience, for in him
The hopes of our great enterprise shall live.”

He scarce had ended, when from all the host
Burst instantly a long and deafening shout,
“ Arbaces !” Like some giant wave foam-topt,
Rolled on the gathering uproar: to and fro,
Like thunder peals among the mountains tost,
“ Arbaces,”—still “ Arbaces”—everywhere.
“ Arbaces” was the universal cry.

His left hand resting on his sheathed sword,—
The banner-staff grasped loosely in his right,—
Pale as a corpse a moment stood the Mede,
Powerless to move or speak. Recovering soon,
Into his car he sprang, and, looking round,
Silence awaited. Then again the shouts
On all sides rose,—again,—and yet again,—
And plumed helms, and swords, and lances waved.
But hark! a trumpet. On their panting steeds,

Nebaioth and the herald are at hand.
Before the sacred minister the crowd
Gives way, and they pass on.

Amid the chiefs

Arrived, the young Assyrian from his horse
Alighted not, but, glancing swiftly round
A proud and angry eye, thus spake aloud.
“What see I here?—rebellion in broad day?
And traitors in my friends of yesternight?
What! are ye mad?—or do ye covet death,—
Fit punishment! and soon to fall on you,
If not to gentleness the king be moved.
What can ye hope?—Oh! ere it be too late,
Strike down yon impious standard;—break the staff,
And Salamenes,—such the words he spake,—
Will of the king, even on his knees implore
Your undeserved pardon.”

At these words

Arbaces rose: but, ere he could reply,
Starting with fury forth, Rabsaris thus,
Clenching his hand—“Tell the foul tyrant this;
On his own knees let him of Heaven implore

Forgiveness, and of us,—and be to hell
 Spurned back, and mocked ! We nothing beg of him ;
 On stubble stands his throne,—his days are told,—
 His rich reward is nigh. Go tell him this :
 And say it was his *friend* Rabsaris spake ;
 Rabsaris !—shout it in his hated ear
 'Till he go mad."

Him interrupting, thus
 Nebaioth answered. " Bold blasphemer ! peace !
 Thy own death summons hast thou this day spoke,
 Shameless ! and thankless ! Spared he not thy life,
 Forfeited justly ? gave not back thy wealth,—
 Lost, by our law, for thy most impious crime ?
 And but imposed upon thee banishment,
 Which thou hast broken ?—Wretch ! *thy* hours are told,
 Even by thyself ; *thy* rich reward is nigh :
 Fly while thou may'st ; or stay and meet thy doom,—
 The fitter course,—ungrateful ! But on thee
 Why waste I speech ?"

To him Rabsaris thus,
 Fire in his hollow eyes. " Fit servant thou
 For such a master !—insolent, and false !

But I have nought with thee, nor heed thy words,
Heartless, and ignorant !”

Nebaioth him

Made answer none ; but to the captains turned,
Conjuring them—“ Oh ! ere it be too late,
Throw down your rebel arms ! the king may hear
Your prayers repentant, and withhold the sword
That else must cut you off. What hope have ye
'Gainst him to strive ? What seek ye ? Madness, sure,
Hath seized you all ; or, by suggestion black,
Some horrid traitor hath your pure minds fouled,
With hellish cunning !”

Ere his speech was closed,
Belesis in his chariot started up,
Angry and frowning. To the sky he raised
His pallid hand, and to th' Assyrian spake.
“ Stay ! stay ! and turn thine eye to yonder heaven :—
There dwelleth *He* whom thou hast traitor named ;—
He that with hellish cunning, as thou say'st,
Hath our pure minds with black suggestions fouled.
Ay ! gaze thy fill ; for even thence it comes,
The voice that hath yon city's doom foretold ;

The fate of him that on her throne doth sit:
There are our prayers upsent; our hopes are there.
We bow not to thy king, but to *his* king;
And *He* hath bid us hope, and led us on;
And still will lead us, till the work be done,
And every stone of yon proud city hurled
To earth, and every beam be burned with fire;
And this abhorred tyranny thrown down;
And earth once more be free! Such hope is ours,—
And so we seek. Thus tell thou to thy king.”

He ceased, and sate him down. Nebaioth then,
By those strange words and that vehement voice
O'erawed, awhile was silent. But, at length,
Spake in reply. “How know ye 'tis from heaven,
The voice ye speak of? which of you hath heard,
Or who hath seen——”

Again the priest stood up,
Rebuking him. “Pollute not thus our ears
With speech profane: the mysteries of heaven
Thou canst not read, unsanctified; not the less,
There are to whom the scroll of things to come
Hath been unrolled; and therein have they read;

And what they read they teach ; and all obey,
Trusting in Heaven. Join, therefore, thou with us,
Or take thy way, and say unto the king
What thou hast seen ; but more we wish thee stay ;
For zealous art thou, and of upright heart,
And valiant for the fight."

Nebaioth then,
Looking around him, spake. " Oh ! friends, beware !
Ye stand upon a precipice's brow,
And are about to plunge ! Oh yet draw back !
Trust not in idle prophecies and dreams,
That lure but to destroy you ! Cast your eyes
Upon yon city, mistress of the world ;
On yon unnumbered armies, that but wait
One word to tread you down ! Oh ! bid me fly,
And say unto the king that ye have seen
Your folly, and have cast your arms aside,
And trampled on yon hateful badge of guilt,
And stooped unto his mercy : surely then
His ear will hearken ; and his anger change
To pity and forgiveness. Harden not
Your hearts in pride ; for dreadful is the wrath
Of kings provoked. Even now behold ! the hosts

On every side fall from you: toward the walls,
 Innumerable as ocean sands they crowd,
 Scared by this black rebellion; call them back,—
 Bid them plead for you,—or too soon again
 Like a destroying plague they may be sent,
 And ye will perish,—madly perish all,—
 And for a dream! a prophecy! Oh heavens!
 Awake ye from your stupor—see—and live!”

He spake in passion; to each well-known face
 Making appeal; and tears were in his eyes.
 To answer him Belesis started up;
 And aged Almelon raised his wrinkled hand;
 Rabsaris too, and Abdolonimus,
 Motioned to speak: but in his chariot rose
 Arbaces; and, him seeing, all were still.
 Then thus, with gentle words, the Mede began:—

“ Thy speech, not all offenceless, have we heard,
 Even to the close; now hearken our reply;
 For through my mouth the thoughts of all thou hear'st;
 Not easy to be changed; nor safe th' attempt;
 Which henceforth, therefore, I forewarn thee shun.
 For thee, Ncbaiothi, though our foe thou art,—

A zealous, and a fierce one soon to be,—
Yet, for a virtuous and a valiant youth,
We do confess thee ; and would gladly join
The hands of love, and clasp thee to our hearts,
And call thee brother. In the silent night,
When on thy quiet bed thou liest down,
And passion is at rest, and reason wakes,—
Then of thy soul demand if all this earth
For one man were created : ask again,
Who is this man?—Is he more wise? more good?
Hath he the lion's valour? or the strength
Of Behemoth, that thus on prostrate lands
His foot he setteth? Of thy soul demand—
Were thy Assyria thus the Median's slave,
Wouldst thou not toil to shake the tyrant off?
Would not thy bosom burn as with a fire?
Wouldst thou not all things dare?—bleed, die, to free
Thy country from the yoke? As for thyself
These things thou answer'st, so for us reply,
And we shall 'scape thy censure. For ourselves
The lot is cast : be what may be th' event,
The struggle shall be made ! The bondsman's breath
Too long we've drawn : we change,—or breathe no more.
Nor think the fury of thy king we dread ;

We know him vicious, sensual, gross, and vain,
And fitter, in a woman's garb, to sport
With painted concubines, than head the fight :
Goodly to view, and with a soldier's limbs,
But hearted like a girl. Nor in yon host,
Retiring now as though our touch they shunned,
Doubt we, before to-morrow night, to find
Myriads of bosoms burning like our own,
And swords with ours to join : and, for ourselves—
Cast round thine eye,—methinks no few are here,
Nor men with women's limbs. But for th' event,
Rest that with Heaven ! the struggle is for us,—
Nor shall the sword, now wakened, sleep again
Until Assyria from her height be cast,
Or we in earth laid low !”

He ceased ; and fire
Flashed from his eyes, for vehement he spake ;
And from the listening multitude went up
Shouts of applause.

Nebaioth once again,
His anger mastering, thus made reply :—
“ Is this the answer that the king must hear ?

Oh ! pause awhile ! for your own doom ye speak.
Wake not the fire that will consume you all ;—
Stir not the lion when his wrath would sleep,
For, rising, he will rend you.”

At that word

Rose Abdolonimus, with cheek all flushed,
And fury in his eye. “Talk here no more
Of fire and lions ! Are we girls, or babes,
Thus to be scared with bugbears ? Haste away,
And bear our answer to thy lion king,
Whom we shall quickly stir, nor dread his rage,
Roar as he may. And, to astound thee more,
Even to his teeth I do defiance send ;
Call him a beast, a glutton, and a slave ;
And will upon him all I say make good,
With this good sword, when he can wield his own,
And venture in the field. That say thou too ;
And say ’tis Abdolonimus, his slave,
And brother king, who this kind greeting sends ;
Hoping ere long within his royal halls
To join him in the feast.”

Nebaioth then :

“ It is enough,—I plead with you no more—

Your blood be on your heads ! But whom, of all,
Name you the leader ?—for to him my words
Shall last be spoken.”

Aged Almelon then
Hasted to answer.—“ What thou hast to say,
Say unto all ; and guilefully seek not
In matters not thine own to pry.”

Thus he,
Fearfully cautious. But the priest arose ;
Arbaces too, a smile upon his lip.
First spake Belesis, pointing to the Mede.—
“ Behold our leader,—by the general voice
This day appointed, but by Heaven long since :
Our ruler now, and, ere long, to be thine ;
When yon proud city shall be black with smoke,
And every stone cast down upon the earth,
And her foul tyrant scattered on the winds ;
And this Assyria, that would grasp the earth,
Shall pass away, and be an empty name,—
Then shall thy knee too bend, and own his sway,
As now we own it.”

To Arbaces then

Nebaioth, turning, spake. "Of all men here,
 To thee the most unwillingly I speak
 That which I speak; for with thy name was praise
 For ever coupled; but deserved reproach
 And infamy shall hang upon it now.
 Even in the sight of these, misled, and lost,
 Do I proclaim thee traitor—by no law
 Stand'st thou protected,—he who seeks thy life
 May take it, and fear not,—thy lands, thy wealth
 Are forfeit—and thy——"

Longer had he spoke,
 But with loud outcries, burst the soldiers in,
 For vengeance burning.

On his startled steed,
 Unawed Nebaioth sat: but from his car
 Leaping at once, Arbaces towards him flew,
 And, with a voice like thunder, bade them back.
 Ashamed, they soon retired; and thus the Mede
 To the Assyrian spake.

"Now take thy way,
 Ere worse betide. Thy bidding hast thou done

Boldly and well, and our firm answer heard.
Farther discourse were useless ; and the time
Craves deeds, not words. Farewell."

Then, looking round,
Two brothers he espied, of Lydian race,
Gentle and valiant both, and well beloved.
One hour had given them birth ; and, as their age,
So were their forms and features matched alike,
That, which they saw, men doubted while they looked.
Their dress, their arms the same ; their steeds alike,
Milk white, without a spot, and swift as wind.
These seen, Arbaces called, and thus bespake :
" Abida, and Abdeel,—through all the host
Guard yon Nebaioth, for an angry mood
Is on the soldiers, and some ill, perchance,
May fall on him untended. But with speed
Away—and tarry not."

Nebaioth then,
Sorrow and anger on his darkened brow,
Spurred back his horse, nor bade adieu. With him
The herald, and, on either hand, the youths

In costly armour bright. Gold were their helms,
With purple plumes high crowned, that, as they rode,
Swayed gracefully ; their shields were gold embossed,
Bright steel their corslets ; and their steeds were clothed
With mail of gilded brass, that in the sun
Glowed like a fire.

The assembly then dissolved ;
And every chief unto his soldiers went,
To rank them for the battle. Through the camp
Rode heralds, with their trumpets, who proclaimed
Arbaces captain of the banded hosts :
And, ever as they spake, loud shouts replied,
And joy was in all hearts.

So they. Meantime,
Within the gorgeous chamber of the king,
Stood Salamenes, in his startled ear
The tale of treason pouring. From his bed
Upsprang the monarch. “ Bring my arms ”—he cried ;
“ I will myself go forth and trample them
Beneath my horses, and my chariot wheels :
Bring me my arms. What ! think they we are lost ?

Or dead? or helpless? Let the priest be called,—
He shall consult the gods. They think us quenched
Because we have our regal splendour hid
From vulgar eyes; but they shall find our blaze
Too dazzling for their own. We have been wrong
To let our power thus sleep. The thundering God
Himself would be derided, did he leave
The lightnings slumbering in his idle hands.
But we are waked, and let them dread the bolts.”

So he, still putting on his radiant arms.
But at the door the white-robed priest appeared:
To him the king. “Haste Timna,—offer up,
Thou and thy train,—a sacrifice. A beast
Is come upon the earth—a dragon fierce;
And him Assyria’s lion would destroy.
Ask of the gods th’ event; then on the plain
Seek us, and tell their will.”

Low bowed the priest,
And said:—“Thy servants, king of kings! shall do
Even as thou biddest: but what beast is this,—
The dragon that——”

Him with impetuous speech
And angry eye, the monarch stopped—"What beast?—
A prophet thou and priest, yet ask me that?
Away with thee:—he lies on yonder plain,
Strong as a hundred thousand fighting men,
With battle steeds and chariots—Get thee gone—
I cannot talk with thee."

The priest bent low,
And answered not, but trembled, and withdrew.

All, save the head, in dazzling armour clad,
The monarch stood: but, when the helm they brought,
Aside he put it, and bade fetch the crown.
Then, placing on his brow the golden round,
Burning with gems, "The soldiers shall this day
Their king behold: but in the chariot place
My helmet for the battle; and my spear,
My bow and quiver; for, by Nimrod's shade!
The foremost in the bloody chase I'll be."

Upon the monarch Salamenes gazed,
Admiring: then, as round his loins he girt
The falchion, sheathed as in one blazing gem,

With belt gem-starred. "Oh! hadst thou ever thus
 Been what the gods designed thee ——"

But his words

The king broke short: "Hold—hold—I know the rest—
 That which I am, I am—Bring wine—one draught
 To take the weight from these uncustomed arms—
 Then to the field."

He said, and drained the cup:

Yet, ere he went, made pause; and in his heart
 Thus communed. "To the battle many speed
 Who never must return! Shall I not see
 My children ere I leave them?—To my queen
 One word of kindness speak? perhaps my last!
 And the gay partners of my midnight joys,
 Shall I not give to them one parting smile,
 And bid them think of me when——fool! fool! fool!
 They love thee not, and would but mock at thee.—
 On to the field!—who are not slain shall live,—
 And they who die will rest, and nothing know."

He said, and down the massive marble stairs
 Strode in his clanking arms. The chariot stood,

Bright as a flame, before the brazen gate,
Awaiting him ; and, at each horse's head,
A warrior armed, that with the impatient steed
Struggled for mastery. As to the seat
The monarch sprang, lo ! with her youngest child,
The queen Atossa from another gate
Came forth, and knew him not, and turned again.
The king beheld, and to himself thus said.
“ She scorns me ever : yet this day methinks
I have not ill deserved :—but woman's mind
Is past even rule of monarchs—let her go ! ”
He said : then caught the golden-studded reins,
And in the chariot leaped. A lower seat
Within the car to Salamenes then
He pointed, and the snorting steeds let go.

Beyond the palace walls a bright array
Of chariots stood, and horsemen by their steeds ;
Awaiting till the long eclipsed sun
Of royalty from out his secret shrine,
Should blaze within the portal, and come forth
To dazzle mortal eyes.

He comes at length :—

The thickening thunder of the wheels is heard :—

Upon their hinges roaring, open fly

The brazen gates :—sounds then the tramp of hoofs,—

And lo ! the gorgeous pageant, like the sun,

Flares on their startled eyes. Four snow-white steeds,

In golden trappings, barbed all in gold,

Spring through the gate ;—the lofty chariot then,

Of ebony, with gold and gems thick strown,

Even like the starry night. The spokes were gold,

With fellies of strong brass ; the naves were brass,

With burnished gold o'erlaid, and diamond rimmed :

Steel were the axles, in bright silver cased ;

The pole was cased in silver : high aloft,

Like a rich throne the gorgeous seat was framed ;

Of ivory part, part silver, and part gold :

On either side a golden statue stood :

Upon the right,—and on a throne of gold,—

Great Belus, of the Assyrian empire first,

And worshipp'd as a God ; but, on the left,

In a resplendent car by lions drawn,

A Goddess ; on her head a tower ; and, round,

Celestial glory : this the deity

Whom most the monarch worshipt ; she whom, since,
Astarte, or Derceto men have named,
And Venus, queen of love. Around her waist
A girdle, glittering with all radiant gems,
Seemed heaving to her breath. Behind the car,
Full in the centre, on the ebon ground,
Flamed forth a diamond sun ; on either side,
A horned moon of diamond ; and, beyond,
The planets, each one blazing diamond.
Such was the chariot of the king of kings.

Himself in dazzling armour stands aloft,
And rules the fiery steeds. His shield of gold,
His spear, his helm, his bow and quiver hang
Within the roomy car. Thus, like a God,
From forth the gates he comes,—and every knee
Bends to the ground, and every voice cries out,
“ Long live Sardanapalus, king of kings !
May the king live for ever !” Thrice he smiles,
And waves his hand to all ; and thrice the shouts
To heaven go up. Then on his starting horse
Springs every rider ; every charioteer
Leaps to his car ; and through the sounding streets
The pageant flames, and on the dusty plain

Pours forth : and evermore, from street to street,
 Runs on the cry, " The king ! the king comes forth !
 The king of kings in his war chariot comes !
 Long live Sardanapalus king of kings !
 May the king live for ever ! "

To the walls

The cry flies on,—they hear it on the plains,—
 The plains cry out,—they hear it in the heavens.
 On through the bowing host the monarch drives ;
 High over all conspicuous, the bright crown,
 Like an ethereal fire, through all the field
 Flashing perpetual light. From rank to rank,
 From nation unto nation goes he on ;
 And still all knees are bent, all voices raised
 As to a deity.

Then swells his breast

With glory, and with shame, and high resolve ;—
 With glory of his pomp and power,—with shame
 For years of sloth and guilt,—with high resolve
 For his whole life to come. Delusion bright !

Meantime Nebaioth, from his fruitless task

All sorrowful returning, saw from far
The dazzling chariot and the burning crown,
And cried—"it is the king! to him my words
Shall first be told: sound, herald, sound aloud,
And bid the people part and give us way."
Then with his trumpet did the herald blow:
The people at his voice made open way;
And they passed on.

Them Salamenes saw,
And thus bespake the king. "Nebaioth comes,
Whom to the rebel camp this morn I sent,—
Will not the king give ear unto his words?"
To him the monarch: "Let the youth approach,
And we will hear him."

To Nebaioth then
The word was given. From off his horse he leaped,
And bowed unto the earth; then rose and spake.
"May the king live for ever! Let my tongue
Bring not on me the anger of the king,
For that the word I say displeaseth him!"

To him the king. "Say on and fear thou nought.

What men are these rebellious? What their strength?
And who their leaders? Answer and be brief."

Nebaioth then, low bowing, thus replied.
"Against the king of kings their impious arms
The Medes, the Persians, and Arabians, chief,
Have dared uplift; but of all other lands
No few there are, and desperate; madly blind;
In prophecies trusting, and deceitful dreams;
This mighty city to the spoiler's hand
Fore-dooming, and her ashes to the winds:
Above them all, this morn elected chief,
The Mede Arbaces, once my friend, and true;
But, for a traitor, even in the sight
Of all his host, by me denounced now.
Yet less in him the daring rebel shows
Than in the priest Belesis; he the minds
Of the mad soldiers fires with madder thoughts;
Foretelling still, and pointing up to heaven;
Inciting, threatening; him, of all, I dread,
For on his words the credulous people hang,
As on a voice from God. Their multitude
I cannot sum; but many, and fierce are they;
Resolved and insolent. Yet let the king

Be strong in hope and fear not ; for with him
Twice three shall stand for one that doth rebel ;
And God, for his anointed one, will fill
The hearts of men with valour ; and their arms
With strength ; and trample down his rebel foes,
And burn them as the stubble. Even now
The fire is kindled,—hark ! I hear their shouts.
With twice ten thousand horse hot Jerimoth
Is on them now. Fierce as a hurricane
I saw him tear the ground beneath his way,—
Shouting like thunder. Be all hearts like his,
And, ere the night, no traitor but shall sleep
His last death sleep.”

The king, while thus he spake,
Within his chariot stood, and looked afar,
Shading his eyes ; then smote upon his thigh,
And cried “ Away !—the battle is begun !
Sound all the trumpets ! shake the flags on high !
Shout, heralds, shout ! to battle every man !
Away ! away ! ”

He said, and raised the scourge :

But Salamenes, ere it fell, stood up,
And cried "Forbear! and be not wroth, O king!
For that I counsel thee. Go not to fight,—
For now men's hearts are troubled, and they look
To this side and to that, and are afraid
For what may come: but throughout all the host
Pass thou this day; and let them see their king:
And from thy treasures let much gold be brought,
And given unto them,—unto every man
A piece of gold; so shall their hearts be thine,
And thou shalt vanquish all thine enemies.
And let the heralds of all nations go
Amid the people and proclaim aloud,
'Thus saith Sardanapalus, king of kings.
Of every fighting man before the walls,
Or in the city, let no man depart,—
For on the morrow will the king go forth
And scatter all his foes.' But send thou now,
And from the fight recall hot Jerimoth,
And let this day be peace."

To him the king.

"Wise are thy words,—even be it as thou say'st.

Ride some of you, the fleetest, and bid back
Young Jerimoth from battle, lest he fall ;
For he is one amid a hundred foes.”

While thus he spake, behold the priests drew nigh,
And stood beside the chariot, and bowed down
Their faces to the earth. To them the king.
“ Arise ye holy men, and say aloud
That which the Gods have shown you, that all ears
May hear the will of Heaven.”

Then the priests
Rose from the earth ; and Timna spake aloud.
“ O king, for ever live ! be the king glad !
For all his foes shall he quell utterly,
And scatter them like dust : the dragon’s fangs
Shall he rend forth ; and break his iron scales ;
And spill his poisonous blood ; and fling his bones
Unto the darksome pit !”

So he aloud :
And all that heard him shouted, and cried out,
“ Long live the king ! may the king live for ever !”

But to the car an Israelitish seer
Drew nigh, and lifted up his hand, and spake.
“ Give not, O King ! unto the false one’s tongue
Thine ear, nor let thine heart with pride be filled :
Jehovah hath his hand stretched over thee,
Thee and thy people, for their wickedness
Which they repent not. In the days gone by
This sinful city at the prophet’s voice
Repented, and the Lord her doom withheld :
So if ye listen also, and the ways
Of wickedness forsake, and unto God
Your proud hearts humble, haply even yet
The awful doom pronounced He will recall,
And ye may live : but your iniquities
If ye repent not, and confess, behold !
The fierceness of His anger shall go forth,
And ye will perish, and this NINEVEH,
This proud and glorious NINEVEH, this queen
Of all the cities, shall be overthrown,
And seen no more at all upon the earth.
The water and the fire have heard the voice
Of the Lord God,—the fires beneath the earth,—
The waters of the fountains of the deep,

Have heard Jehovah's voice, and wait the sign.
King of Assyria hearken to my words:
Forsake the paths of thine iniquity:
To Israel's God cry ye unceasingly,
Thou and thy people all, that He may turn
His out-stretched arm aside, and strike you not.
Beware the banquet!—o'er thine enemies,
Even as these false ones, prophets not of God
But of the spirit accurs'd, and to thy harm
Have taught thee, and thy pride the more to lift,
Awhile thou mayst be victor—but—beware!
I have beheld, and lo! a banquet spread,—
A midnight revelry,—an eastern king
With all his lords and captains and his hosts
Rejoicing,—and the women of the land
With timbrels, and with dance, and wanton wiles,
Their hearts delighting: but behold! there came
The chariot, and the war-horse, and the sword
Suddenly on them; and with blood the earth
As with long rain was steeped,—and with the slain,
As with the hailstones when the storm is loosed,
The plain was covered. After that, behold!
The floods upheaped against the city came,—
The tempest, and the earthquake, and the fire,—

And hosts like to the sands for multitude,—
And of that mighty city not a stone
Upon the other standing was there left !
King of Assyria ! harden not thy heart ;
But to the servant of the living God
Give ear ; so may it yet be well with you.”

The prophet ceased ; then turned, and went his way.
Nor spake the king unto him ; for those words
Motionless held him, and that pale stern brow.
Confused he sat, and silent ; in his breast
Anger, and pride, and awe till then unknown,
Alternate ruling : but at length began.
“ What man is this that to Assyria’s king
Hath spoke rebuking ? whence, and who is he ? ”

Before the king bowed then a priest and said.
“ O king of kings ! a stranger in the land
Is he ; a priest or seer of Israel,
Of that down-trodden Israel who their God
Above Assyria’s God in might extol,
And at Chaldea’s worship make their mock,
Blaspheming : but as one possessed is he ;
For through the city, with uplifted hands,

These three days hath he gone, and cried aloud,
' Beware ! beware ! the day of wrath is nigh !
The day of vengeance on great NINEVEH !
The sword, the flood, the earthquake, and the fire,
Have heard Jehovah's voice, and are at hand !'
So hath he still cried out ; and, as he crieth,
The people laugh, and point, and mock at him.
Let not the king be troubled at his words."

Ceased then the priest, and to the earth bowed down :
And, after silence brief, the king replied.
" Prophet, or madman, wondrous are his words ;
And will not from me pass. Speed after him :
Bid him more heedfully his Gods consult,
And better augury find, so to the king
Well pleasing he would be. Upon his hand
This jewel place ; and, when the sun goes down,
Unto the palace let him come, and stand
Again before me, and from Israel's Gods,—
What Gods soe'er they be,—the answer speak."

Thus saying, from his chariot leaned the king,
And in the hand of the much wondering priest

A flaming gem let fall : gave then the sign,
And onward moved the car.

Then toward the seer
The priests advanced ; and, when the king's command
They had fulfilled, to him, with angry voice,
Thus spake the high priest Timna :—" Who art thou
That darest before the king of kings stand forth,
Presumptuous ! in his royal car to pour
Thy breath pestiferous ? What words are these,
Infatuate ! thou hast spoken, that have cast
A cloud upon the king ?—and knowest thou not
That, where Chaldea's high priest stands, thy tongue
Should never dare to wag ? But thou hast got
Thy guerdon, and art satisfied ;—beware !
For I can crush thee."

Haughtily he spake,
With threatening hand ; then gathered up his robe,
And turned away.

But thus to him the seer,
Undaunted.—" Stay, and hear me. For the words

That to the king I spake,—with God, not man,
I shall account : but, for this gaudy gem,—
My guerdon, as thou say'st,—I sought it not,
Nor covet it,—my recompense must be
Far higher, and from higher hand.—'Tis thine,
If thou wilt stoop to lift it."

Saying thus,

Upon the ground the flaming stone he threw,
Then turned, and went his way, and looked not back.

Astonished, a few hasty strides advanced
Th' incensed high priest ; but stopped, and after him
Gazed for a moment : " Madman ! let him go !—
What he hath here thrown down, shall him throw down :
Thou little blood-red stone shalt be the type
Of his own blood, so cast upon the earth
As thou by him wert cast." He said, then stooped,
And lifted up the gem.

The king, meantime,

Flew o'er the plain ; and everywhere the shouts
Unceasing tore the air. But in his heart
A pang arose as on the words he thought

Of that bold Hebrew : yet upon his brow
No cloud permitted he ; but still spake out
With cheerful voice, all hearts encouraging :—
Fame to the valiant,—to the needy wealth,—
Power, rank, to the ambitious,—unto all
Eternal honour promising. Yet oft
Remembered he the wine-cup, and quaffed deep ;
And thought upon the banquet, and the joys
Of long night revels : “ But one parting night !—
To-morrow comes the battle—I may fall—
Then will this last and precious night be lost,—
And all my glory vanish like the smoke.
But that stern prophet stands before me still,
And checks me with his eye. Pale fears, begone !
Music, and love, and wine, this night I’ll have,
Though with the next come death !”

So all the day

From host to host he went : but, ere the sun
His weary horses in the earth’s dark shade
Drove down to slumber, through the palace gates
Passed he ; from his tired limbs the armour doffed ;
Then bathed, and sought the feast.

But from his toil

No rest found Salamenes: through the camp,
 From nation unto nation, still he flew:
 With equal hand the gold distributing;
 With promises, and praise, and hope of wealth
 All hearts inciting. Nor in vain he toiled;
 For many a wavering mind unto the king
 He turned again; and many a lukewarm heart
 Inflamed with zeal; that for the morning's fight
 They thirsted.

Yet not all,—for, when the eve
 O'er the vast plain her darkening shadow drew,
 The sound of hasty footsteps might be heard,—
 The tread of many a steed,—the softened roll
 Of chariot wheels upon the noiseless sod;—
 Some for their homes departing,—some to 'scape
 The perils of the battle,—most to join,
 With heart and hand, the banner of the free.

But where the Bactrians camped, and all the host
 From Sogdiana northward, to the south
 Of Arachosia, by the banks of Ind,—

Ahab, the Bactrian leader, to his tent
The chiefs convened, and briefly thus began.

“ Why wait we here?—Our year of servitude
Is past, and we are free.—What means the king?
The service we consented to is paid,—
What would he more? For us what hath he done,
That we for him should peril life and limb?
Doth Bactria ask him aught?—and what owe we,
That he of us fresh toil and blood should ask?
What is't that Bactria to Assyria owes?
Hath she befriended us in desperate hour,—
O'erthrown our enemies? or from the ground
Upraised us, being fallen? or, if in peace,
Hath she been like a sister in her heart,
That we should love her, and our blood pour out
To do her service? No! the love we owe
Is such as to the lion owes his prey;
Such as the vanquished to their tyrant owe;
And such, while he can force it, will we pay,—
Not longer. Why our services claims he?
Because he is the mightier, and his arms
More numerous far. But lo! his strength is shorn:

Armies, once his, start up his enemies,—
What was his strength, becomes his weakness now :—
That which upheld, now drags him to the earth :
What then ?—what claim to service hath he left ?
What asks he ? for his gain, and nought for ours,
That we the Babylonians, Persians, Medes,
Arabians, and of every land beside,
In mortal strife should meet. What enmity
To these owe we ? Through Persia when we passed,—
Through Media, and through Babylonia part,
We met but friends : shall we requite them thus ?
For what ? for whom ? We are prepared for march,—
Not battle ; and our wives and children look
To see us home : shall we remain to die,—
Or put our friends to death,—when we may turn
Towards our own hearths our unmolested feet,
And clasp our wives and children in our arms,
Our sisters, mothers, and our grey-haired sires,
Whose feeble limbs now miss their rightful staffs,
And whose dim eyes still overflow with tears,
Thinking of us ? Who for the high renown
Of dying here to uphold Assyria's throne,
Now falling, is ambitious,—let him stay,
And perish, and be glorious : but for us,

Who are not greatly covetous of praise
So bought,—nor feel much debt of gratitude,—
Let us go rather on our homeward road,
Inglorious though the path, than win renown
By lying on Assyria's battle-field,
Though mid a thousand foes. Ye have my mind :
If so my counsel please you, then send forth,
And, by the midnight hour, let every foot
Stand ready for the march ; and every horse
Wait for his rider : but the foot go first,—
The chariots and the horsemen in the rear,—
Lest we be followed, and confusion rise.”

He ceased ; and much his counsel pleased. At once
To strike the tents they cried, and journey back ;
For with the thoughts of home their minds were filled,
And tears stood in their eyes. Then toward the door
They rushed tumultuous : but, with earnest voice,
Called Azareel, the Arachosian chief,
Standing within the middle of the tent ;
And, hearing him, they turned.

“ Stay—stay, my friends !
And think again. Oh ! whither would ye fly,—

Dishonoured and debased ? not to your wives,—
For they will spurn you back, and spit at you,—
Not to your fathers,—they will scoff at you,—
Not to your children,—they will blush for you,
Deserting thus your friends. Oh ! are ye lost
So poorly in the childish love of home,
That glory, honour, all which men hold dear,
Seem worthless in your eyes ? and will ye then,
Like trembling thieves, at midnight steal away,—
When on the morrow shall the trumpets sound,
And twice a million swords and bucklers clash
In contest for the world, which, as you aid,
May be redeemed, or lost,—for ever lost !
What ! think ye, if the tyrant conquer here,
That on the banks of Indus ye are safe ?
Think ye to leave him when he needs you most,—
Yet have his thanks and love ?—Or deem you then
The contest doubtful,—and so matched the force,
That ye in safe neutrality may rest,
Of peace assured, without the cost of war,—
Left, wisely, to your friends ?—Oh ! hope it not !
Folly and baseness only so could dote !
Your choice is twain, against, or for the king :
For him to combat, and be meanly safe,

Fettering, and fettered more, and knowing still
That, had ye not been base, ye had been free ;—
Or else against him, to your last red drop,
Wielding the sword for liberty, or death,—
For glory, or the grave ! Here take your choice,—
No other course ye have but what is foul,
Foolish, and dangerous !”

In warmth he spake,
Conjuring them ; but they his words liked not ;
And cried aloud to strike the tents, and fly.

But Azareel, incensed, stood forth again,
Upbraiding them ; and Japhet by his side,
His only son, who, for his father, begged
Their patient hearing : but, with words of scorn,
They answered him, and sallied from the tent.

Them, as they went, with proud uplifted voice,
Thus Azareel bespake : “ Fly—fly—brave men !
Your wives are waiting for you,—get you gone,
While yet 'tis dark and safe to steal away ;—
But haste ye, for to-morrow swords will clash,
And blood will stream. Oh shame ! eternal shame !

How will your names be blackened by this deed !
How will you curse yourselves, and be accursed !
Friend-leavers ! and home-seekers ! in the hour
Of trouble and of death ! Haste ! haste away !”

So he,—while, loudly laughing at his zeal,
Forth rushed the joyous captains, eager all
For home, and peace, and feast, and dance, and love.

With angry brow stood Azareel awhile,
Listening the laugh and merry scoff without ;
Then, as it died away, to Japhet thus.
“ They ’re gone, and will the minds of all the host
Sway to their purpose : let us hasten then,
And, whom we may, to better thoughts incline,—
All may not yet be lost.”

Amid the host
They mingled then, men’s bosoms stirring up
To thoughts of nobler things.

But at the feast,
Amid his beauteous concubines, meantime,

Sardanapalus sat, and revelled high ;
And thought no more of treasons or of war.
Music, and wine, and love, his heart inflamed ;
His eye shone brightly, and his cheek was flushed :
Loud was his voice, and jovial was his laugh ;
And many a whisper in some favoured ear
He breathed,—and many an amorous glance cast round
To eyes that glanced again. Then, suddenly,
Came on his mind remembrance of the seer,
And that strange warning ; and his brow grew dark,—
Yet not with dread. “ Call in the priest,”—he cried ;
“ And let the music cease : and you, fair dames,
Retire awhile,—yet thou Azubah, stay—
Abiah too,—and Ephah,—but the rest,
Haste to the garden,—for the moon is up,—
And gather flowers : we’ll come to you anon—
And make for me a regal coronal
Of ivy, woven with jessamine and rose ;
For I will be God Bacchus for this night,
And we’ll out-dance the stars. Awhile farewell,—
The bower is lighted, and the music breathes.”

Swift, at the word, upsprang light feet ; bright eyes

And ardent faces for a moment glowed,
And passed away,—then in the moonlight air
Sweet voices rose, and died, and all was still.

Before the frowning monarch stood the seer,
And bowed, and spake no word. With angry eye,
The king awhile in silence on him looked,
Then sternly thus.

“ What man art thou, bold priest !
That of the king hast dared to make thy mock ?
What higher guerdon, say'st thou, must be thine ?
And whose the higher hand must give it thee ? ”

One step the seer advanced, and pointed up
To heaven, and spake. “ My guerdon is with God !
And his, O king ! than thine that mightier hand !
Not for the love of gold, or precious stones,
Came I before thee,—but from Israel's God——”

Still spake the priest, when thus the king.

“ Beware !

Presumptuous prophet ! lest that mightier hand

Come not to save thee when this weaker falls,
And crushes thee to dust!—No answer, priest—
And lift not here thy hands unto thy Gods.
Guerdon enough for thee had been one word
Upon thy dog bestowed;—Yet thou must prate
Of higher hands, and throw a monarch's gift
With scorn away:—but make a swift amend,
With better augury than was thy first,
And I forgive thee. Fill a golden cup
Azubah, and bestow it on the seer:
And when he hath the sparkling juice drained down,
Then in his bosom let him place the cup,
And think upon the king: and fill for me
A brimming goblet, for my heart is vexed.
What! dost thou falter?—Nay—a larger cup—
And to the brim.”

Azubah then arose,
And knelt unto the king, and softly said,
“ Now let my lord a little while forbear,
Lest that the priest incense him, and his wrath
Be heated by the cup.”

But then the king

Upraised her, smiling, and himself filled up,
 With ruby wine, a goblet to the brim.
 "Bear thou," he said, "a cup unto the priest,
 And have for me no fear. Prophet, thy cheek
 Is ghastly as a death upon a tomb,—
 But pour thou now that blood celestial down,
 And it shall make thee ruddy as the morn,
 And cheerful as the lark; and brighten too
 Thy gloomy eye that thou may'st better read
 The better counsel of the favouring Gods.
 Drink priest,—and deep."

He ceased, and took himself

The fatal cup and drank. But still the seer
 Stood motionless, and tasted not the wine.
 To him the king, "Why, prophet, stand'st thou thus?
 Dost fear, in presence of the king, to touch
 The wine cup?—but he bids thee,—drain it off,—
 Then shalt thou read a happier augury
 Than the dull tale thou toldest him this morn."

To him, with solemn tone, the pale-browed seer.
 "The wine-cup never yet, O king! hath touched

These lips, nor fevered my cold eye to see
 For truth, false, pleasing lies; nor may it now,—
 For unto Heaven a solemn oath I swore,
 And will not on my soul bring perjury.”

Astonished sat the king, and at him looked :
 Then on the ivory table, gem-inlaid,
 Smote with his hand, and sternly thus replied.

“ O’ermuch presume not, priest !—a king hears not
 Of oaths forbidding what himself hath bid.
 What matter unto me thy vows insane ?
 Or if as hell thou’rt black with perjuries ?
 Presumptuous !—But on this I waste not words,—
 Drink, or refrain, poor lunatic !—but speak—
 Hast thou with nobler offerings sought thy Gods ?
 And what the answer ? Tell me not again
 The fire, the water, and the banquet threat,—
 For I am he that will not brook that word—
 But be myself the threatener—Am not I
 Sardanapalus,—of all kings the king ?
 Do not all nations at my throne bow down ?
 And by the babbling stream, and sputtering fire,

Must I be threatened?—and the banquet too?
 Thou foolish seer! bethink thee who I am,—
 And prophesy more wisely.”

Thus the king,
 Flushed with the draught: yet still he laid again
 His hand upon the goblet; but the seer,
 Advancing, said aloud, “Forbear, O king!
 Touch not again the poison of the cup,—
 For as I live, and as thou livest ——”

“Wretch!”

Exclaimed the king, and started from his throne,
 And on the floor the golden goblet hurled:
 “Thou miscreant priest! comest here to tutor me?
 Thy life may answer it;—take heed—take heed!—
 The sword is whetted that thy neck may feel—
 Provoke me not!—a fire is in my breast
 That may consume thee, madman that thou art!”

But, unabashed, the seer prepared to speak,
 When, timidly, upon his robe, her hand
 Azubah laid, and, with faint, tremulous voice,
 Thus whispered, “Oh! incense not so the king,

Thou holy man ! for dreadful is his wrath,
 And deadly now, with cursed fumes of wine
 Inflamed ;—for his sake, as for thine, be wise,
 And with soft words his wrathful spirit sooth.”

So she, with looks imploring, and with words.
 But on her pale, bright face the prophet looked ;
 Then thrust her from him. “Woman !” he exclaimed,—
 “Get back, and touch me not ! I know thee now,—
 The harlot that Rabsaris once called child :
 Ay ! let it sink thee : but no words are mine
 To sooth the guilty in their angry mood :
 I stand to tell the will of Heaven revealed :
 Sardanapalus ! thee I bid beware—
 The banquet first, the water, and the fire,
 Do threaten thee ! thy kingdom to the Mede
 Hath been appointed !—but to God turn thou,—
 To Israel’s God, repenting,—and thy guilt
 Confess,—and purify from sin the land,—
 Then may’st thou ’scape and live !”

As from a blow,
 Beneath the prophet’s eye Azubah shrank,
 And trembled as he spake. Her burning face

She covered with her hands, and sobbed aloud,
And sank upon the floor.

From out his den

As glares a hungry lion, hearing nigh
The growl of tiger o'er his bloody meal—
So on the Hebrew silently awhile,
With look terrific, glared th' astonished king,—
His breast, with fury inexpressible
Boiling, and heaving like an earthquake's throes.
Suddenly then he started from his trance—
Upon the priest, swift as an arrow, sprang—
Seized—dashed him headlong—

On the marble floor

The body fell,—rebounded—fell again—
And quivered—and lay still.

A piercing shriek

Rang through the hall. Pale, and with quivering lips,
And sinking limbs, Abiah hastened out,
And Ephah, sick with horror, turning still
To look on what they feared. But from the floor
Azubah rose, with wild and gleaming eye,

And went behind the king, and touched his robe.
 She dared not look,—but, with averted face,
 Pressed with one hand convulsively her brow,
 And with the other gently strove to draw
 The murderer from the slain.

Pale, breathless, weak,
 Amazed,—with quivering jaw, the monarch stood,
 And stared upon the corse. The corse on him,
 With open mouth, and ghastly glaring eye,
 Seemed staring back again. Azubah still
 Drew at his robe, but could not stir him thence ;
 So fixed with horror stood he : but, at length,
 From his racked breast these faltering words broke forth.

“ What deed is this ! have I been mad ? Lo ! then,
 Already is one threatening come to pass—
 The banquet !—ha ! the banquet !—this it is
 He bade me shun—the poison of the cup !
 But he was mad, and insolent—fool ! fool !
 Why did he dare me when my blood was hot ?
 What could he hope ?—And my Azubah too,
 He called a harlot—thrust her to the earth—
 Caitiff ! he had his due. But not from me,—

Not from my hand the judgement should have fallen,
If ever fallen. Oh ! accursed juice,
That hast these hands with blood for ever fouled—
How I do loathe thee ! Henceforth be thou far !
And fire not passions, of themselves too hot,
Till they burn out the brain ! Oh ! what a wretch—
A beast am I ! Azubah, art thou here ?
I saw thee not.—This is a worthless deed—
Let us away—To-morrow shall he have ——
To-morrow ?—ha ! I do bethink me now—
A hundred thousand, now alive, may have
Their funeral to-morrow. Yet this one
More shocks me than —— I'll think upon't no more !
The wine-cup and these lips no more shall meet,
Or but as strangers, coldly. Come away—”

He ceased, and looked a moment on the corpse ;
Then with Azubah, pale and trembling, went.

’Twas midnight now : the melancholy moon,
With wasted face unwillingly arose
To walk her weary course : upon the plains

Gleamed faintly the moist herbage : shadows drear
And long, from lofty and umbrageous trees,
Slept on the earth ; pale light, and dreamy shade
Covered the silent city ; her huge towers,
Like a Titanic watch, all standing mute ;
And, in the centre,—like the spectre-form
Of perished Saturn, or some elder god,
The dim vast mound. Within their tents the hosts,
Or on the earth, in heavy slumber lay ;
Some of the battle dreaming,—some of love,—
Of home, and smiling wives and infants some ;—
The chase some urged,—some at the wine-board sat,
And drank unmeasured draughts, and thirsted still.

But, sleepless, by his tent Arbaces stood,
And listened to a low and heavy sound,
Like the faint rushing of far distant waves.
Upon the earth beside him lay the priest,
Gazing at heaven, deep rapt. His hollowed hand
Behind his ear Arbaces placed, and stood,
Unbreathing, with strained eye, and lips apart,
To catch the uncertain sound. Then suddenly,
Shading his brow, looked long and anxiously

Across the plain : twice paused, and closed his eyes,
And looked again ; then thus :—" Belesis,—up,—
Look forth, I pray thee, for the gleam of arms
Far off, methinks I see."

Upsprang the priest,

And gazed intently and long, then thus :—
" I have been communing with yon bright host,
That now my eyes are dazzled, and see ill.
There, where thou pointest, are the Bactrians camped,
And all from Sogdiana to the south ;—
Least likely they of all, with zeal o'er hot,
Night onset, for the tyrant, to commence ;
And, if they come, as friends be sure they come."

He still was speaking, when Arbaces thus,—
Smiting upon his thigh :—" By all the Gods !
It is an armed host ! Sound out th' alarm !"
But instantly a distant voice replied,
" Hold ! hold ! blow not the trumpets,—we are friends."
Then came the tramp of steeds,—loud breathings soon,—
And, in an instant, paused before the tent
Three panting horses. Lightly to the earth
The riders leaped, and towards Arbaces walked.

With hand upon his hilt prepared stood he :
But, when he saw them nigh, advancing, took
The hand of him, the foremost, and thus spake :—
“ What brings thee now, Abdeel ? and who are these ? ”
Upon their faces, as he spake, he looked,
And knew them ; “ Japhet, sure, and Azareel,—
Welcome, most welcome, for your faces show,
And your warm grasp, that not as foes ye come :
But answer quickly,—what is yonder host
Moving in arms ?—I bade to sound th’ alarm,
But ye cried “ hold ! ”—say, are they friends or foes ? ”

Then Azareel :—“ Foes are they, and yet friends ;—
Friends that not foes,—foes that not friends they be ;
They will not, against us, the tyrant aid,—
Nor us against the tyrant ; but their homes,
Their ease, inglorious, rather would prefer,
Than noblest fame, by toil and danger won.
We, with some hundreds of a better mind,
Whom at the outskirts of your camp we left,
Of all the Bactrian nations come alone
To aid your glorious struggle : but the rest,—
A hundred thousand fighting men thrice told,—
Now journey homeward.”

“ Yet shall they return,”

Exclaimed the priest,—“ nor see as yet their wives,—
For, or against us shall they come again ;
But either way shall we be victors still ;
For it is written, and must come to pass.”

Arbaces then :—“ Oh ! had but nobler thoughts
Moved them with us to struggle, then had 'scaped
Myriads that now will fall ; for contest hard,
And long must be, such disproportioned strength
Ere we can vanquish ; nor their labour light,
Our fewer numbers, with strong spirits armed,
To utterly o'ercome. But in the Gods
Our trust is, who our foes can put to flight,
Though numerous as the atoms of the dust
That follows on their trampling ! Enter now
My tent, I pray you, and abide till morn :
For with the dawn must we be stirring all,—
And midnight is gone by.”

Thus he, and drew

The curtain of the tent that they might pass.
But Azareel replied,—“ Our followers wait

Till we return ; therefore again we haste ;
But for thy love our thanks not less are owed."

To them Arbaces, as their hands he grasped,
And bade adieu :—" Our thanks, the rather, take,
For that, amid a mean and selfish host,
Ye stood the only noble : fare ye well."

A like salute made they, and soon were gone.
The hollow trample of their coursers' feet
Died quickly off, and all again was still.

A little while Belesis and the chief
Stood yet in low discourse. To heaven at length
The priest upraised his arms and pallid brow,
Praying in silence ; then around him girt
His mantle, and, with face toward the sky,
Stretched on the earth his limbs. A moment yet
Arbaces stood : upon the camp looked round,—
With folded palms close prest, then up to heaven,—
Drew next aside the opening of the tent,—
Bowed low his lofty head, and entered in.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

WITHIN his splendid chamber, by all flowers
Of fragrance rare and exquisite perfumed,—
Beneath a silken canopy, gold-dropt,
Reposed the guilty king. One crystal lamp,
With oil sweet-scented fed, its soft, pure ray
With the pale moonlight mingled.

As he slept,
Again the murderous deed he acted o'er,—
The pale stern seer again cried out, “beware!”
Again with boundless rage his bosom heaved,—
He rushed again to dash him headlong down,—
But then he griped some hideous, nameless thing,
That with him fell, and crushed him to the earth,
And held him there, all shattered, yet alive.

Such was his agony. Above the couch
Azubah leaned, and gazed upon his face,
Guessing what stirred him thus: for down his brow
The big drops ran; his teeth were set, his hands
Fast clenched; his every limb convulsed and stiff.

“Unhappy king!” said she, “by night and day,
The prey of passions strong and terrible!
Fierce in thy love, and fatal in thy rage,—
Yet with a heart by nature noblest framed,—
But Oh! perverted! lost! awake! awake!”

Speaking, she stirred him: but the dream was strong,
And held him like a spell. He woke at length,—
Started with trembling limbs, and griped her close,—
Glaring upon her with distorted face,
As on some monster. But, with soothing voice,
“’Tis I,”—she said—“Azubah.”—

At the sound

His hands relaxed their gripe,—his face grew calm,—
One deep long sigh he breathed, and laid him down;
Nor spake, but on her pale face gazed long,

Pressing her hand,—for her of all he loved
With passion least debased.

But at the gate
A trumpet blast was heard. Half starting up,
He listened,—and again the clang burst out.
“’Tis Salamenes,” cried the king,—“away!
Haste thee Azubah,—for that timeless note
Speaks evil in the message.”

Stooping then,
His brow she kissed, and went. A rapid foot
Upon the marble staircase echoed loud,—
And soon within the chamber, bright in arms,
Stood Salamenes. Breathless with his haste,
Into the ear of the indignant king
The new revolt he told,—the Bactrians fled,
And all the nations of the farthest east.

Fierce as a roused-up lion sprang the king.
“Call up the soldiers,—every man,” cried he,—
“Pursue, and slay them utterly.—My arms!
Traitors and cowards!—not a foot shall tread

Its native soil again—Away—away—
Why dost thou linger ? ”

Salamenes then :

“ Let not the king judge rashly : the wild boar
Escaping, who would stay when, on himself,
He saw the tiger rushing ?—better thus
That they fly both than with our enemies league.
Enough, and more, the audacious Mede to crush
With us remain : but, by an ill-timed stroke,
Urge not the fliers, for commutual help,
Their arms with his to join, lest harder strife
Await us ; and, by bad example lured,
Others as false may prove.”

To him the king.

“ Wisely thou counsel'st—but the vengeful stroke,
Though for a while delayed, shall surely fall.
To-day the Mede shall sink,—to-morrow they.
Away at once ! the dawn begins to peep ;—
Arouse the camp,—but silently,—the bolt
Shall strike them, ere they dream the thunder nigh.
Worms ! they shall know their lord.”

He said, and donned
His glittering arms, and dreadful was his wrath.

But in the Median camp, the while, all eyes
In sleep were closed. With the pale moonlight now
Mingled the opening dawn. Their dull round trod,
With weary foot, the watchers of the night :
A heavy mist o'erhung the earth ; the trees,
The tents, all dripping with distilled dews.
Unstirred by any breath of air, down hung
The banners heavily.

From out his tent,
Bare-headed, and unarmed, Arbaces came,
And looked into the morn. Upon the earth,
Beneath the standard, lay the warrior priest,
With eyes wide open gazing on the sky ;
Yet in deep sleep. The Mede upon him looked ;
Then toward the east ; but thought the day far off,
And drew again the opening of the tent,
Stooping to enter : but the tramp of steeds,
Far off, was heard : he paused : with rapid foot,
Nearer they came : awaking at the sound,

Uprose Belesis ; from his mantle shook
The beaded dews, and to Arbaces spake.

“ Already up, young chief ! befits it thus
The leader o'er his host perpetual watch
To hold. But is this cold dim light of dawn,
Or the pale moon ?”

To him Arbaces then.

“ 'Tis but the moon, methinks ;—but who are these
Spurring so early ?”

Even while he spake,
Two horsemen from their smoking steeds leaped down,
And toward them hasted,—Azareel the first,
And Japhet, who the panting horses led.
To them Arbaces. “ Latest at the night,—
At morn the earliest,—ever welcome, friends :
What stirs you now ere dawn be well abroad ?”

To him the Arachosian. “ Noble Mede,
And worthy sure in arms o'er all to rule !—
For bravest art thou known of all the host,—

Hear yet the counsel of a friend : my years :
 Are twice thine own,—then blameless may I speak.
 Already in the Assyrian camp is heard
 A stir, and from the city : if for war
 Preparing, I know not ; yet likest so,—
 For Salamenes with a sleepless eye
 O'erlooks the host : but, whatsoe'er the intent,
 Rouse thou the soldiers, and, the first, assault ;
 So shall themselves be taken in the toils,
 And, with bold hearts, against unequal force,
 Our warriors wage the fight."

Arbaces then.

" Wisely and bravely dost thou counsel, chief :
 Let then the troops be waked, but silently :
 No trumpet blown, no battle token heard,
 Let all in stillness put their armour on ;—
 So, whatsoe'er may chance, prepared we stand.
 But rashly to begin assault, unwise
 I deem ; for in yon host what hearts with us
 May yet remain, we know not ; who, when time
 Shall bring occasion, or their wavering minds
 Settle aright, may joyfully their arms
 With ours conjoin. Such may we haply lose,

Harsh onset first beginning. Our best part,
 More to protract, than hasten on the fight ;—
 For the long custom'd reverence that to kings
 Subdues the will of man, once questioned, dies,
 And, in its room, proud thoughts rise quickly up
 Gendering defiance. Such in thousands now
 Amid yon host are waking : but, when swords
 Are drawn, then doth the hot and angry blood
 Madden the reason, and to hatred turn
 What might have grown to love.”

While yet he spake,

A horseman, riding furiously, drew nigh,—
 Then leaped to earth, and bowed before the chiefs,
 And spake. “ Unto the captain of the host
 Thus saith Rabsaris :—‘ In the Assyrian camp
 A sound of arms is heard, and tread of feet ;—
 Will not Arbaces bid the troops arise,
 And arm them for the battle ? ’ ”

Ère he ceased,

From Abdolonimus another came,—
 From Azariah,—from Almelon too,—
 Like message bearing each.

“ Away at once ! ”—

Cried then the chief—“ let every man take arms :
But silently—no trumpet blown—no shout,
To tell the foe our rising.”

Instantly,

Through all the camp a thousand ready steeds
Were trampling ; and the clink of arms anon
Was heard, and hum of preparation swift.

To sacrifice Belesis then retired :

But, standing at the entrance of his tent,
His glorious arms Arbaces donned in haste,
And bade his chariot forth. Brass was his helm,
With gold thick plated,—and his shield was gold,
Massive and huge. Upon its ample field
The splendid sun was sculptured, and the stars
That o'er his birth-hour ruled. His corslet steel,
Bright as a mirror, and impassable
To stroke of human strength. His ponderous sword,—
Not to be wielded but by arm like his,—
Damascan tempered, of the purest steel,
Keen as a razor's edge, and dazzling bright.
Brazen his greaves,—his sandal clasps were gold ;

And o'er his golden crest a snowy plume,
Lofty and ample, like some haughty dame,
Bent proudly as he trod.

Ere yet in arms

Full clad was he, far off arose the shouts
Of onset furious. Instantly swift horse
For tidings sent he ; but himself stirred not ;
Calmly awaiting lest a feigned assault
Should lure him in a snare. Around him soon,
In splendid arms, th' admiring captains stood ;
In silence stood and listened ; for the din
Louder arose,—but to the right far off ;
Calm elsewhere all.

But now, from out the south,

A gentle wind sprang up. In ponderous clouds
Rolled on the mist,—now opening,—closing now,
Thickening—and opening still.—By fits gleamed out
The distant city,—its gigantic walls
Through the thin vapour to unearthly bulk
Enlarged,—yet unsubstantial as the air
Appearing,—or like city of the clouds,—
Or architecture false of wizard's might.

But, as the sun arose, one flood of light
Poured for an instant full upon the walls,
Turning them all to gold :—that moment flew
Wide open the great central eastern gate,—
And, by the blaze and flashing that came forth,
They knew the chariot of Assyria's king
Was issuing then. Again the cloudy waves
Rolled on, and all was lost. Nor had appeared
Aught of the battle yet: but many horse
Returned anon, who told how Jerimoth
Upon the Babylonian infantry
Made onset fierce. Th' Arabian chariots then,
And horse, Arbaces to the battle sent.
But, all unarmed, into his chariot sprang
Belesis; his broad shield alone snatched up,
His sword and lance, and to the battle drove.
Calmly Arbaces to his glittering car
Arose; and toward the city slowly moved,
And with him all the host.

The king, meantime,
Forth issuing from the gate, astonished heard
The din of war begun. Incensed, he cried,
“ What means this boldness?—Who, unbidden, dares

Battle commence? Is the king nought?—Or hath
The insolent rebel, first, his desperate sword
Presumed to draw?”

He asked, but answer none
Knew any man to make. Upon the plain
A space he drove, then paused; and to the fight
Swift horsemen sent, who of the battle's course
Might bring report. Toward the Median camp,
Upstanding in his car, himself looked out;
But saw not, for the sky was glaring bright,
And thick with mist the plain. To Michael then,
Who o'er the Assyrian chariots ruled, he spake;
And to Nebaioth, captain of the horse.

“ Michael, have ready thy two thousand cars,—
For to the battle I anon will drive:
And with thy fifty thousand horsemen thou,
Nebaioth, follow: and when we shall break
The rebel ranks, and scatter them abroad,
Then come ye in, and trample them to earth;
And let your swords be drunk with rebels' blood,
For mercy shall be none. From out the foot
His ten score thousand men bid Joshua take:

And when the chariots and the horsemen go,
Then let them follow ; so shall none escape.
But, Salamenes, thou with all the rest
Behind remain, and witness that we do."

So he ; and many a look impatient cast
Upon the misty veil, and to the left
Where raged the fight, awaiting till the time.

But in a hot and bloody conflict now
The Babylonian foot against the horse
Of Jerimoth contended. Like the blast
Of whirlwind through the unresisting corn,
Scattering and breaking down, so came he on :
Amid the unprepared ranks burst through,
Shouting, and trampling. Terror, at the first,
Seized on all hearts ; and, casting down their arms,
To flight turned many : but their chief not so,—
Brave Azariah : he, already armed,
With thrice ten thousand bowmen, soon equipt,
Stood firm ; and on the advancing horsemen drove
An arrowy cloud, that like a hailstorm beat
Upon their armour, and full many a man
And steed stretched on the earth ; like a thick hail

They from their ample quivers poured amain
Unceasing death ; while from the slingers flew
On every side huge stones, which flesh of man
Or steed could pierce, that many a horseman now
Turned back and shunned the conflict : many paused
Dismayed, and looked behind.

Yet not the less,

Fierce as a tiger, laughing at the spear,
The arrow, or the stone, flew Jerimoth ;
And with him thrice a myriad mailed steeds,
And riders all in mail. Repulsed in vain,
Again impetuous to the charge they rushed ;
And dreadful were the cries, and dying groans,
And terrible the slaughter. But, unchecked,
Still on went Jerimoth ; his foaming steed
All clad in brazen armour, dazzling bright,
With gold o'erlaid ; himself in flaming mail
Of gilded brass, and glittering steel secure.
From horse and rider glanced the spear aside,
The arrow, and the stone. The ranks, hurled down,
Like grass were trampled : falchions then were red,
And earth with carnage steamed. But, standing firm,
Bold Azariah drew his mighty bow ;

And as, all fearless, Jerimoth came on,
Right toward him rushing, to the glittering head
The arrow drew—and loosed. The steed it pierced,—
His eye transfixed, and in the brain sank deep,
That he fell dead. As by a thunder-stroke
Smitten, he fell ; and fell his rider too,
With arms loud clanging. Then went up the shouts
From Azariah, and from all his host ;
And swiftly on they pressed : but, swifter far,
Flew on the Assyrians, and around their chief,
An iron bulwark, gathered. On the ground,
Stunned by the fall, lay he, as he were dead :
And at that instant, like a bursting flood,
Dashed on the Arabian horse, and steed 'gainst steed
Drove furiously. Dreadful the uproar then,—
Helmet and corslet ringing to the stroke ;—
Horse 'gainst horse shocking. But from off the ground
Rose Jerimoth unhurt, though giddy still ;
Another courser backed, and to the fight
Like a galled lion sprang.

Now harder waxed
The struggle, and on neither side appeared
Vantage, till, flying in his lofty car,

His priestly vestments streaming in the wind,—
 His head uncovered,—lightning in his eyes,—
 Came on Belesis. “Men of Babylon,
 On to the battle!—God beholds you now!
 God will fight for you! Drive upon the foe!—
 See—see—they turn—on!—every man rush on!—
 Fear not—for God is with us!”

Shouting thus,

Along the Babylonian ranks he drove,
 And fired them to the battle. By his voice,
 And by his presence moved, with tenfold rage
 Against the foe they rushed. Undaunted yet,
 Against o'erwhelming odds fought Jerimoth,
 And with him thousands of his choicest men,
 Proud with their chief to die: but many a look
 Behind he cast, expecting aid to come;—
 “Surely the sound of battle must be heard,
 And they will strengthen us.”

Within himself

Thus said he, still retiring,—fighting still,—
 And vainly hoping still. No succour came:
 Nor through the veil of cloudy vapour aught

At distance might be seen. So toiled he ;
And round him thousands perished.

But the king

Sat in his chariot, waiting the return
Of those who to the fight for tidings went.
Impatiently sat he, and vainly strove
The mist to pierce. But, louder and more loud,
The din of battle grew : thick tramlings soon
Of steeds in flight were heard, or in pursuit ;
Shouts, as of triumph,—cries of those who fled.
“ Why tarry they ? ”—he cried,—“ and come not back
To tell me of the fight : why tarry they ? ”

Anon came horsemen, flying like the wind,
Who told how Jerimoth, unequal matched,
Fled from the combat. At that word, the king,
Upstarting in his chariot, cried aloud ;
“ Madman ! how dares he uncommanded lift
His sword in battle ? Now let Adriel haste
With two score thousand horse to turn the fight,—
And Ahaz with the spearmen, and with those
That draw the bow, twice five score thousand men,—

And of that host accursed let not one
This day escape, for surely shall the earth
Their blood rebellious drink. But, Dara, thou
Ascend my chariot, and the coursers rule,
For with the sword, and bow, and flying spear,
Myself will wage the battle."

At the word,
From his own car out-leaped the blushing youth,
And in the royal chariot, at a bound,
Lightly upspringing, from the monarch's hand
The ruby-studded reins, low bowing, took,
And the resounding scourge. In every strife
For swiftness, both on foot and in the race
Of steeds, and chariots, far was spread his fame ;
But in the fight he joyed not, for his soul
Was with Nehushta in the moonlight bower.
Ruling the steeds, upon the maid he thought,
And many a sigh breathed forth, and tender wish.

But, in his lofty car upstanding now,—
Two spears, steel headed, gleaming in his hand,—
His arm the monarch raised, and, pointing, cried ;

“ On to the battle !—yonder lie their hosts
Most numerous, and perchance expect us not ;
Upon them like the thunder-bolt ! Away !”

Started the chariots then ; the pawing steeds
Bounded ; and to the rushing of the wheels,
And to the tramlings, the deep shaken earth
Answered in thunder.

But Arbaces still,
With all the Median chariots and the horse,
And thrice a hundred thousand foot, well armed,
Expecting stood the tidings of the fight :
And many a prayer to the bright God of day
Went up, that he the cloudy air would clear,
And show the battle field. But horsemen now,
With helmets waving, shouting as they flew,
Proclaimed that Jerimoth, defeated, fled,
And, after him, in hot pursuit, the horse,
And the Arabian chariots, and the foot.
Then, with a summons like a trumpet call,
Shouted Arbaces, standing in his car ;
“ On to the battle ! every man away !

Strike while they reel!—On! to the city on!
The arm of God is with us!”

At the word,
The fiery steeds upore the groaning ground;
Thundered the wheels; and, like the rush of waves,
Sounded the tread of that vast infantry.
Then spake the trumpets out, a thousand tongues
Of blaring brass; and timbrels, and the clash
Of cymbals; and all instruments clear-toned,
That stir the heart in battle: and the voice
Of every soldier was sent up to heaven
In shouts that rent the air. High in the midst,
The splendid ensign, azure, silver starred,
With diamond-sprinkled sun of burning gold,
Rayed with bright diamonds, to the fresh breeze
Rolled out its glorious hues.

So moved they on,
Rejoicing: but not far, when, like a fire,
Behold the blazing chariot of the king!
And, after him, the chariots and the horse
Rushing to battle. At that sight, a shout

Arbaces sent, exulting, and exclaimed,
“ Into our hands hath God delivered him !—
Charge every chariot,—every horseman charge—
For now his hour is come !”

So he ; then stooped,
And to his charioteer, deliberate, thus :
“ Darius,—what I tell thee heed thou well,
And fear not : right upon the tyrant’s car
The horses urge, and wheel in wheel drive close :
Our chariot is the stronger,—we will break
His axle short, and hurl him to the earth
Headlong,—so with one happy blow perchance
Decide the battle. Nearer—nearer still—
Now—let the flanks of the horses graze as they pass.”
Thus he, and, rising, his tremendous spear,
Uplifted for the stroke. With equal rage,
His huge lance poising, toward him flew the king :
His mail of steel, and helmet, diamond-starred,
Flashing bright flame. But Dara heedfully,
The shock foreseeing, gently turned the steeds :
Darius also, fearful of the clash,
Drew artfully the rein, small space between,
That the fierce wheels might pass.

Thrown from the chariot,—and his bow and spears
Seized he, then, like a lion on his prey,
The king to overtake flew on. But after him,
With tempest rush, th' Assyrian chariots came :
Lances and darts whizzed round him : close behind,
Like the hot pantings of the desert-blast,
Within his ear, and on his cheek he felt
The blowing of the steeds : with voice, and rein,
And sounding thong, the charioteers impelled
The horses on that they might trample him :
But, turning as he ran, the nearest steed
Upon the forehead with his battle-axe,
As with a thunder-bolt, Arbaces smote,
And with loud squelch and jar unto the ground,
Stone dead, headforemost drove him : o'er him rolled,
With hideous clash, his fellows ; and the car
Flat to the earth was hurled. On flew the Mede :
For now, brief space before, the royal car
Slow wheeling round he saw,—with labour hard
Dara the hot steeds curbing,—on he flew,—
The chariot reached,—and, his tremendous axe
Uplifting high, a fatal blow designed :
When, ere it fell, a horseman, rushing by,
Upon the shoulder smote him, that his arm

Sank numbed and useless,—and a brazen dart
Upon his helmet that same moment struck
With horrid jar, that all the sky seemed flame.
Amazed and wild, down from the car he leaped,
And, staggering, looked around. On either hand
The chariots towards him rushed. A moment's pause,
And he were lost ;—into a Median car
Upsprang he,—for the charioteer beheld
And curbed the steeds,—upsprang he, and the mist
Passed from his eyes, and all his strength returned.

But now in horrid shock the chariots joined :
Dreadful the crash of wheels fast locked,—the rush
Of mailed steeds,—the ringing of the shields,
Corslets, and helmets ; and dreadful were the shouts
Of triumph, and the cries and dying groans.
Now too, on either side, the barbed steeds,—
'Ten times ten thousand,—to the battle rushed ;
And the earth shook.

Recovering from his trance,
Sardanapalus, with uplifted voice,
Cheered on his soldiers. Foremost in the fight
Himself still fought ;—now hurled the heavy spear,—

Now from his bow the hissing arrow loosed,—
Leaped from his chariot now, and, sword to sword,
Strove with the foe : and single arms met few
That might with his compare.

In equal scale

So hung the fight ; till now the Median foot,
Advancing, on the Assyrian ranks poured down
Sharp arrows first in clouds,—and heavy stones,
Sent from the sling,—and whirring lances next,
And brazen darts, that many thousand deaths
Brought in their flight. Then on the Assyrians came
Confusion and dismay ; and, as they turned,
Shunning the iron tempest, with loud shouts
The foe pursued, and terrified the steeds
That they fled headlong. Nor when to their aid,
With twice a hundred thousand valiant foot,
Came Joshua, could they stand before the Mede,
For fear was on them. Vainly did the king
Call on them to be men : into the midst
Of battle vainly drove he, daring death,—
In vain did Michael and Nebaioth urge
The chariots and the horse to stem the flood,—
Terror had seized them, and their arms were weak.

Called them to turn ; adjured, and threatened still :
But him no ear would mark ; so rang the voice
Appalling of Arbaces, and the shouts
Of the victorious foe. Then cried the king ;
“ Haste, Michael, from the press ; and heed not thou
To trample down the dastards as they fly ;—
To Salamenes hasten : bid him here
With every horse, and every fighting man,
And every chariot ;—for thy life make speed.”—

Him hearing, Michael with loud voice cried out
To clear the way : then seized himself the reins,
And whirled the sounding scourge, and through the press,
Still shouting, urged ; yet many threw to earth,
Borne by the horses down, and by the wheels.

Him, as he went, Sardanapalus marked ;
And still called out, and bade him hasten on ;
For now his heart misgave him, and he thought
Upon the seer, and feared his fate at hand.
Far as the mist, slow clearing, gave him scope,
Around the flying host his eye he cast,
And saw but terror and despair on all.

But nearer than he thought was help even then ;
For Salamenes, uncommanded, sent
Fresh forces to the fight.

Three anxious hours,
Listening the double conflict had he stood :
But toward the left,—where Adriel with the horse,
And, with the spearmen, Ahaz, to the aid
Of Jerimoth had gone,—was heard, at first,
The sound of conflict loudest : thinner grew
The mist, and dimly might he now descry
The far off battle ;—horsemen urging on,—
Chariots, like winged dragons, to and fro
Fiercely careering,—helmets, plumes, and shields,
Together dashing,—rolling here and there
In multitudes, like billows of the deep,
Foam crested : but, anon, whence fought the king,
Came sounds more terrible,—the roar of fear,
And headlong flight it seemed : yet, far away,
Wrapped in the mist, all was uncertain still ;
And, if the king were victor, who might tell—
Or if the rebel ? But, ere long, far off,
Horsemen, as if in flight, were faintly seen :

"Perchance", thought he, "they hasten from the king,—
 But no,—they turn again,—his arm prevails,—
 The traitors fall,—so should they!—Yet again
 Come they,—in number more, and madder flight;—
 And chariots now;—but, if Assyrian they,
 Or Median, through this dim air who may tell?—
 Again they turn, and seek the fight anew.—
 Why sends he not?—Surrounded, perhaps, in vain
 He calls for succour;—shall I longer wait,—
 Or, uncommanded, hasten to his aid?—
 Yet that hath he forbidden:—but, perchance,
 He hath already fallen,—or may fall,
 Unaided now; and curse me in his heart;—
 See! see! the rout increases!—horse, and foot,
 And chariots mingled,—come what fate may come,
 Not longer will I waver!"

Pondered so

The noble Salamenes; then at once
 Swift horsemen called, and thus. "To Zadok fly,—
 Tell him the foe prevaieth and comes on:
 With twice ten thousand horse into the fight
 Bid him advance: thou Abdiel to him speed,
 And Gareb:—but unto Jahaziel thou,

Zulmanna, haste, and thou, Shemiramoth ;
Bid him his five score thousand foot lead on ;
No moment must he pause ;—an instant lost,
All may be lost.” So he, and was obeyed.
Then to Jehoshaphat, who with his cars
Of iron, thrice three hundred, for the fight
Fiercely impatient stood, himself flew on,
And, loudly shouting, cried “ Away ! away !
Drive—drive your horses till the axle-trees
Be hot as in the fire !”—

His voice was heard ;
And with thick trappings instantly the ground
Resounded, and the thunder of the wheels.

Not far the chariots and the horse had gone,
When, in full flight, the cavalry, like clouds,
On thundering came ; and cars, with dust and blood,
Besmeared and foul. His bright sword waving then,
Loud shouted Zadok, bidding them return ;
And in his car Jehoshaphat stood up,
Shouting, and whirling high his glittering spear.

That aid unlooked for seeing, with loud shouts

Sword against sword they stood, and foot 'gainst foot,—
Chariot with chariot striving,—horse with horse,—
And neither could prevail. Thus, till the sun
In the blue concave at his summit stood,
And poured down fire upon the steaming plain,
In equal fight they toiled : and, where the hosts
Of Jerimoth and Ahaz 'gainst the men
Of Babylon fought and all the' Arabian horse
And chariots, equal also was the strife.

But Salamenes yet unmoving stood,
Unto the king obedient ; and by turns
To either battle looked,—yet inly vexed,
And panting for the fight.

But now, once more,
Assyria's monarch and the Median chief,
By chance of battle met. For, in the ear,
An arrow pierced a courser of the king ;
There stuck, and into madness fretted him,
That curb or voice he heeded not. From his,
Like madness took the rest : of all restraint
Disdainful,—fire emitting from their eyes,—
And from their gaping nostrils steam in clouds,—

Right through the battle flew they ; men and steeds
Crushing, and casting down, and many a car
Hurling to earth.

That saw the watchful Mede,
Rejoicing, and to Abner cried aloud :—
“ See ! see ! my friend—the Gods will aid us now !—
The tyrant’s steeds with madness have they struck,
That he may fall before us :—turn aside,
And lash the horses in pursuit.” So he ;
And, in his chariot standing as they flew,
Fixed on the king his eye.

With voice and rein,
Vainly, meantime, strove Dara to delay
The raging steeds. Unmastered as the winds,
O’er dead and living recklessly rushed they.
From side to side swaying, on went the car ;
And, leaving now the battle for a space,
Flew o’er the plain. From Dara’s hand the reins
Snatched then the king, his stronger arm to try :
But voice, or rein, or scourge, nought heeded they ;
And nothing might prevail. And now the Mede,
Upstanding in his car, toward them drove,

Bending his dreadful bow. Him saw the king ;
Then to his charioteer the reins resigned,
And to his seat sprang back, with equal arms
To greet him making speed. But suddenly,
As by their driver urged to headlong flight,
Aside the mad steeds swerved, and from the Mede
The indignant monarch bore. Then cried aloud
Arbaces, taunting ; and his charioteer,
Exulting, smote the horses in pursuit.
Thrice did the terrible arrows of the Mede
Upon the impassable armour of the king
Strike like the glance of lightning. Standing up,—
His back toward the steeds,—the monarch bent
His bow in anger, and, to every shaft,
Hissing reply sent back ; still calling loud
To Dara, bidding him the coursers curb :
But his lashed Abner onward furiously,
Shaking the reins.

Now, shorter space between,
Each warrior laid aside the bow, and took
In his right hand a spear, for mortal stroke
Ere long determined.

First out flew the lance
Of the indignant king ; but erring flew ;
For, backward in the chariot as he rode,
Less true his aim, standing unsteadily :
But then Arbaces cast. The monstrous beam
Right toward the bosom of the king flew on,
Sullenly whirring. He the coming death
Beheld—and stooped. Close o'er his crest it passed,
Bending the plume. Then rose again the king,
And, with more cautious aim, a second lance
Hurled at the Mede,—with all his strength hurled he.
Hissing the weapon rushed ; but yet again
Erred from the mark. Well for Arbaces so !
For with such fury flew it, that, the car
Striking in front, right through its coat of brass,
And through the oaken plank, and inner plate,
Crashing it burst, and in the gaping rent,
Angrily gnarring, jarring, rocked to rest.

Down looked the astonished Mede, and at his feet
The whole bright point beheld. Then, rising, aimed,
And drove the rushing spear ; not harmless now.
True to its aim the monarch saw it still,
And leaped aside ; so scaped : but, on the head,

Striking the wounded courser of the king,—
Deep in the brain the forceful weapon sank,
And smote him dead. Down fell he instantly ;
And over him the hindmost horses rolled,
Chest to the ground. Out sprang at once the king,
Drawing his sword, the traces to divide ;
And with him Dara. Toiling as they stood,
The chariot from the cumbering corse to free,
Tow'rd them, with sword in hand, Arbaces flew ;
And, flying, cried aloud—" Turn tyrant, turn !—
Leave thy dead steed, and of thyself have care,
For surely shalt thou perish ! "

At these words,
Started the king, and, his broad shield of gold
From out the car upsnatching, toward the foe
Sprang furiously. That seen, Arbaces paused ;
For, in his haste forgotten, his own shield
Within the chariot hung ;—and if to turn,
And take it thence, he doubted,—or to rush,
With odds against him, to the mortal strife.
A moment, but no more, in doubt he stood :
In his good cause then trusting, and that strength
Which never yet, in battle, or in sport

Athletic. equal met,—his flaming sword
 Aloft he shook, and went : the snowy plume
 To his light tread, as of the wild steed's bound,
 Airily dancing, went he ; and to him
 The king, approaching, thus.

“ What wretch art thou,
 That, twice this day, hast dared to meet the king,
 In battle insolent ?—Presumptuous worm !
 Learn now that monarchs have the arm of God
 To punish traitors.—Bend thy giant knee,
 And swear allegiance here ; thy swiftest horse
 Unto our chariot yoke, and clear the dead
 That cumpers it ;—with us then to the field
 Return, and thy black guilt in traitor's blood
 Wash out,—then shall the king thy pardon give,
 And set thee high that men shall bow to thee,
 And call thee lord,—for valiant sure thou art,
 And mighty in the battle.”

Scornfully

Spake then the Mede. “ To other king than Him
 Whose throne is heaven, this knee shall never bow :
 But least of all, thou sceptred goat, to thee,—

Drunken and lewd !—To die, or slay thy foe,
Prepare, and talk not ; for in me behold
The Mede Arbaces.”

Half the name remained
Unuttered still, when, rushing, he beheld
The gleaming falchion of the maddened king.
The blow with his own sword aside he turned ;
But struck not yet again ; for, fierce as fire,
Out flamed the king,—blow driving upon blow
Impetuously,—the eye with glare of steel
Dazzling,—and deafening with loud shouts the ear.
Now stepping back,—now warding off the stroke,—
To this side springing now,—and now to that,—
With arms unequal thus, the Mede awhile
Defensive fought ; still watching till the shield
Entrance should leave unguarded. But not long
Cool measure kept ; for on his corslet twice,
Loud knocking, the fierce weapon of his foe
Entrance demanded ; and the iron door,
That never yet to arm of man gave way,
At the third summons burst. No longer then
The Mede his rage subdued : with giant strength,
And lightning swiftness, waving high his sword,

Down through the lifted shield he drove it,—down
 Through plume and adamantine helmet,—down
 Through the thick broidered lining—through the skin,—
 And pierced, at last, the bone. But, with the stroke,
 Like glass in fragments flew the tempered blade ;
 And in his hand the ivory haft alone
 The astonished Mede beheld.

Amazed and stunned,—

Uttering no sound,—a moment stood the king :
 From his relaxing hand down dropt his shield,—
 His sword dropt down ;—with wide and vacant eye,
 And mouth agape, a moment there stood he,—
 Then helpless, unresisting as a corse,
 With heavy jar fell back.

Leaped Dara then,

Swift as a leopard,—the fallen sword caught up ;
 And, to defend the body of the king,
 The Mede confronted. Weaponless stood he ;
 Yet even so for that slight youth a match
 Unequal far. But now no time for proof ;
 For, rushing onward,—shouting as he flew,
 And toward the battle pointing, Abner thus :

“Up! up into the chariot!—for your life
Leap up!—ten thousand horse—away—away!”

Arbaces looked. Like clouds before the storm
Driven on, the squadrons came, beneath their feet
The firm earth shaking.

Farther contest vain,
Into his car then sprang the indignant Mede;
And instantly, like arrows from the bow,
Bounded the steeds away. Toward the host
Of Media flew they; and, in close pursuit,
A cloud of horse. But rapid were the steeds
Of Abner, and unharmed their riders bore.

Nigh to the battle now, his mighty voice
Arbaces lifted up and cried—“Haste!—haste!
Turn every horse and chariot now with me;—
The tyrant is struck down,—they bear him off,—
Upon them every man!—the day is ours!—
God hath been with us!”

Far away that voice
Was heard; and, instantly, proud necks were seen

Of war steeds turning,—chariots wheeling round,—
And spears innumerable, toward their chief,
Hasting for fierce assault. But, them to oppose,
From the Assyrian host as many rushed ;
And dreadful was the struggle, and the din
Went up to heaven.

Meantime, around the king,
Great was the thronging, and the terror great ;
For all men deemed him slain. But, when the helm
Was taken from his head, and on his breast
The corslet slackened, and his burning brow
With cooling perfumes laved,—to life again
He came, and, in amazement, looked about.
The battle recollecting, from the earth
To rise then strove he, with a feeble voice
Exhorting to the onset : but not thus,
From that tremendous stroke unharmed to escape
Might mortal hope : slight wound appeared ; nor loss
Of vital fluid much, the strength to drain,—
Yet such the shock benumbing of the blow,
That o'er his eyes hung dimness,—on his breast
A load, and faintness over every limb.
For battle all unfit he deemed himself ;

Then bade them bind the wound, and from the field
Bear him away. Then in their arms they raised,
And placed him in the chariot. By his side
Sat Peresh, the physician, and upheld
Upon his breast the monarch's drooping head.

But loud as thunder now went up the shouts
From all the Median host,—“ The king is slain !
The tyrant is destroyed !—shout ! shout for joy !
Shout all ye nations ! for the earth is free !
Slain is the king ! the tyrant is no more !”

Then were the Assyrians troubled in their hearts,
And fought not as before ; step after step
Backward retiring, with a feeble arm
They struck, and fearful : but, when from the fight
The dazzling chariot of the king they saw
Rapidly driving,—then no more they strove ;
But turned upon the foe their backs and fled :—
Horse, chariots, foot, in hideous tumult mixed,
On fled they, and the earth was heaped with dead.

But Salamenes now, with all his host,
That rout beholding, moved unbidden on.

With chariots and with horsemen first went he ;
And after them the foot, impatient all
To rush into the fight. Him met the king,
Pallid and bleeding still, yet by the air
Refreshed, and by the chariot's rapid whirl.
Upright he sat, though feeble, and these words
To Salamenes spake :—" Why linger'st thou ?—
Fly—fly—and turn the fight again,—stay not,—
No time for words,—I shall return anon.—
So tell the soldiers—quick !—my signet take,—
The rule of all the host is in thy hands,—
Away and conquer !"—

Bending as he spake,
Within his brother's hand the sign he placed,
And motioned on. At once the rapid cars
Divided ;—to the city flew the king ;
But Salamenes, with the restless host,
Rushed to the battle.

Looking on the field,
Within a watch-tower sat the pensive queen ;
And, by her side, Nehushta, in her hand
Her mother's pale hand grasping. Silently

Upon the distant battle looked they long,
 With pallid cheek, and quick and wandering eye,
 That troubled thoughts bespake. And often thus,
 Within her heart, the melancholy queen
 Held commune.

“ What forebodes this lengthened strife?
 Said not the flatterers of Assyria's might
 That, like the grass beneath the lion's foot,
 Our foes should be trod down?—Yet still they stand
 Audacious, though the roused up king himself
 Against them in his terrors hath gone forth.
 Not thus to meet them looked he, sword 'gainst sword
 Audacious lifted: 'neath a monarch's frown,
 No rebel, said they, could a moment live;
 But, like the proud tree smitten by Heaven's fire,
 Beneath the glance must fall. Believed he that?
 Oh! ever hath he in a flatterer's breath
 Found music! Hapless! sensual! fallen! and lost!
 That in thy unstained youth didst seem a thing
 For common men to worship as a God!
 What thoughts are in thy fiery bosom now?
 How feelest thou,—thy name and power defied,—
 Thy throne,—whereon, for thrice five hundred years,

In splendour undisturbed, and awful power,
Thy fathers sate,—the prize proclaimed now
For which with rebels thou must stoop to strive?—
And, when the insolent soldier his base sword,
Against thy crowned and anointed head,—
Whereto earth's mightiest would have bent the knee,
And deemed it honour,—bravingly doth lift,
Scoffing, perchance, with vulgar speech, thy state,
What saith thy proud heart then, Assyria's king?
A stern school hast thou now to learn how false
The praise of sycophants : yet, with strong heart,
From thy foul, sensual bed thou hast uprisen,
And girt thee to the task ; that praise be thine,
For little can I give. Oh ! turn not back
Into the miry slough : then may the past,
Like a foul corse, be buried from my sight ;
And a new glorious future,——how I dream !—
Even now, perchance, the weapon of a slave
May leave to him no future ! Dreadful sight !
How many myriads must this night be stiff
Upon their gory beds, that with the sun
Rose joyously ! how many wives will wail !
How many children will be fatherless !
Kind Heaven ! Oh ! comfort them !”

With thoughts like these,

On the far distant battles looked she still,
 And on a gliding spot of restless light,
 That, from the conflict moving, seemed at length,
 A chariot,—but far off, and indistinct.
 Beholding it she thought upon the king.

With fixed eye looking, that same fiery spot
 Nehushta saw ; and in her fearful heart
 Sad thoughts arose. “ Oh ! is my father there ?
 His chariot sure it is that burns so bright !
 Why comes it from the battle ? God of all !
 Protect him, and this hideous struggle stay !
 And thee, too, heaven protect, beloved youth !
 How horrible the sound, though far away !
 What in its awful vortex ! Where art thou
 Dara ? Oh where art thou ? Ye gods that love
 The guileless heart, your shields hold o'er him now ! ”

So she : but nearer now the chariot drew ;
 And in their hearts both said, “ It is not he ;
 His steeds are white as snow ; but these like night,—
 It cannot be the king.” But, nigher still
 As it came on, new doubts arose, and fears ;

And thus Atossa to her daughter spake.
“ What chariot yonder from the battle comes
Driving so rapidly ? the steeds are black,
Or, by the splendour that around it burns,
Thy father’s it might seem.”

Nehushta then ;

“ Oh ! not my father’s ! yet, if his it be,
No ill may have befallen ; likest his
Surely it seems ; yet other cars are bright,
And, in this blaze of sunshine, might appear
Dazzling as that. Three forms methinks I see ;
Perhaps some wounded friend he brings from fight ;
Or, wearied of the battle, hastens home ;
Nor marvel were it,—for to toil like this
Little inured is he.”

So she aloud ;

Then paused ; for on the charioteer her eye
Was fixed, and in her bosom many thoughts
Arose conflicting.

But the queen, ere long,

In haste stood up, and cried "It is the king,—
Wounded I fear!—come instantly away."
So she; and down the watch-tower went with speed;
Then, with Nehushta, to her chariot rose,
Trembling and pale. His scourge the charioteer
Whirled round, and the gold-studded reins threw up
Unto the pawing horses. Like the wind,
Through the resounding streets then on flew they;
And to the palace.

Through the gates erelong
Glanced, like a meteor dimmed, the monarch's car,—
Blood sprinkled,—fouled with dust;—the ebon steeds
With creamy foam bespattered,—their full eyes
Flashing,—and their loud-blowing nostrils spread.
Into his chamber, pale and bleeding still,
And with bewildered look, the king was borne.
Him, as he came, Nehushta and the queen,
With anxious faces, met; and question put,
With tremulous voice, kind 'tendance offering:
But coldly them he eyed; and, on a couch
His languid limbs outstretching, called for wine,
And signed to them to go. Yet, patient still,

His brow Atossa wiped, and softly thus :
 “ Take not, I pray thee, of the wine cup now ;
 For thou art wounded, and the burning juice
 Will heat thy blood to fever : but thy thirst
 With cooling draughts allay, the while I search,—
 And haply heal, for I, thou knowest, have skill,—
 Thy hurt, which, left untended, or by hand
 Unskilful touched, worse consequence may bring.”
 With her Nehushta joined, her father’s hand
 Tenderly kissing ; and her bright blue eyes
 Swimming in tears.

On her the king looked not ;
 But to Atossa, with stern voice and brow,
 Frowning thus made reply. “ Thy kindness now
 Unwelcome comes, unsought ;—thy proper place,
 O’erproud, thou dost disdain : but stoop not then
 To the poor leech’s office. When I sued,
 Then wert thou haughty, colder than the snow,—
 Reproachful, and contemptuous :—be so still,
 And leave me, for thy look offends me now.”
 To him the queen replied not ; but arose
 With grace majestic, and her daughter’s hand

Pressed as she went, and said—"Stay thou behind,
And keep from him the wine cup: haply thou
May'st better move him."

But, incensed, the king
Cried out—"At once away—why linger ye?—
I would be left."

That hearing, they withdrew;
Nehushta trembling, and with tear-gemmed cheek;
But with calm brow the queen, and bearing high,
Yet full of womanly grace.

From off his couch
Half rose the king, relenting as he gazed
On that majestic beauty passing forth;
And softly called "Atossa": but the voice
Reached not her ear; and he, ashamed, sank back,
Himself reproaching: "Oh thou woman's fool!
When wilt thou wisdom learn? Is this an hour
For dalliance, when thy very throne and life
Hang on the battle's chance?—Why am I here?—
Why came I from the field?—My strength returns:

I will go forth again,—and from my head
 Pluck off this bloody witness that the king
 Is, like the slave, but mortal.”

While he spake,

Uprising, he the bandage tore way,
 And placed upon his brow, in sudden haste,
 A helm of steel ; then cried—“ Prepare my car,—
 I will go forth again.” But,—reeling now,—
 Blood from the opened wound fast streaming down,—
 Giddy, and faint, upon the couch he sank,
 And cursed his helplessness ; and cried—“ Bring wine,—
 And bind my wound again ; for even thus
 I will unto the battle.”

While he spake,

Came Peresh, the physician, in his hand
 Herbs bearing, and fine linen for the wound.
 The bleeding king beholding,—on his head
 The helm, and that strange wildness in his looks,—
 Frenzied full sure he deemed him, and replied :
 “ Thy wound, O king of kings ! this hand shall bind ;
 The juice of healing herbs infusing first,
 The blood to stanch, and bid the flesh unite ;

But far from thee, dread lord ! the wine cup hold,
For to thy wound 'tis poison."—

“ Peace, old man ! ”—

Cried then the angry king,—“ thy counsel keep
For fools that heed it. To the fight must I :—
Bind then my wound ; but, my lost force to gain,
The goblet give me, for sure strength is there,
Prate as thou may.”

He ceased, and raised his hand,
And took the cup : but, ere his lip it reached,
Gazed on it for an instant, shuddering,—
Then dashed it on the floor,—and cried aloud,
“ Take hence that goblet !—cast it to the fire,—
And never let my eyes behold it more !
His blood is on it ! Peresh, thou say'st true,—
Poison is in the wine cup,—madness,—guilt,—
I will not drink ;—come—bind thou up my wound :—
The banquet, and the water, and the fire,
He bade me fear—I will not taste the cup !
Bind now my wound,—and quickly,—and bid forth
My chariot,—I will haste unto the fight.”
That said, he ceased, and sank upon the couch,

Dizzy and faint,—and in a long swoon lay.
But, when his sense returned, with healing herbs
His wound they dressed, and with fine linen bound :
His heavy armour from his limbs then took,—
Next, cooling drinks, and drugs of slumbrous power
Administered,—and left him to repose.



BOOK THE SIXTH.

MEANTIME, within the oft-frequented bower,
Nehushta sat, and Dara. 'Twas a spot
Herself had chosen, from the palace walls
Farthest removed, and by no sound disturbed,
And by no eye o'erlooked ; for in the midst
Of loftiest trees, umbrageous, was it hid,—
Yet to the sunshine open, and the airs
That from the deep shades all around it breathed,
Cool, and sweet scented. Myrtles, jessamine,—
Roses of varied hues,—all climbing shrubs,
Green-leaved and fragrant, had she planted there,—
And trees of slender body, fruit and flower ;—
At early morn had watered, and at eve,
From a bright fountain nigh, that ceaselessly
Gushed with a gentle coil from out the earth,

Its liquid diamonds flinging to the sun
With a soft whisper. To a graceful arch,
The pliant branches, intertwined, were bent ;
Flowers some,—and some rich fruits of gorgeous hues,
Down hanging lavishly, the taste to please,
Or, with rich scent, the smell,—or that fine sense
Of beauty that in forms and colours rare
Doth take delight. With fragrant moss the floor
Was planted, to the foot a carpet rich,
Or, for the languid limbs, a downy couch,
Inviting slumber. At the noon-tide hour,
Here, with some chosen maidens would she come,
Stories of love to listen, or the deeds
Of heroes of old days : the harp, sometimes,
Herself would touch, and, with her own sweet voice,
Fill all the air with loveliness. But, chief,
When to his green-wave bed the wearied sun
Had parted, and heaven's glorious arch yet shone,—
A last gleam catching from his closing eye,—
The palace, with her maidens, quitting then,
Through vistas dim of tall trees would she pass,—
Cedar, or waving pine, or giant palm,—
Through orange groves, and citron,—myrtle walks,—
Alleys of roses,—beds of sweetest flowers,—

Their richest incense to the dewy breeze
Breathing profusely all,—and, having reached
The spot beloved, with sport, or dance awhile
On the small lawn, to sound of dulcimer,
The pleasant time would pass ; or to the lute
Give ear delighted, and the plaintive voice
That sang of hapless love : or, arm in arm,
Amid the twilight saunter, listing oft
The fountain's murmur, or the evening's sigh,
Or whisperings in the leaves,—or, in his pride
Of minstrelsy, the sleepless nightingale
Flooding the air with beauty of sweet sounds :
And, ever as the silence came again,
The distant and unceasing hum could hear
Of that magnificent city, on all sides
Surrounding them. But oft with one alone,
One faithful, favoured maiden, would she come ;
At early morn sometimes, while every flower,
In diamonds glittering, with its proud weight bowed ;
When through the glistening trees the golden beams
Aslant their bright flood poured, and every bird
In his green palace sitting sang aloud,
And all the air with youthful fragrance teemed,
Fresh as at Nature's birth :—her pastime then,
The flowers to tend,—to look upon the sky,—

And on the earth,—and drink the perfumed air,—
And in the gladness of all things be glad.
But in the placid twilight hour of eve
Not seldom came they : Dara then the harp,
Or dulcimer would touch ; or, happier still,
His words of love into her listening ear
Distil with sweeter music than from string,
Or breathing pipe, though sweet.

But now the tale

Was of grim battle,—ghastly wounds, and death,—
And of her father, and the rebel chief,
Mighty as Nimrod ;—how in fight they stood,—
And how the foe prevailed ;—and how himself,
For her loved sake, the terrible warrior faced,
Her sire defending ;—how the clouds of horse
Rushed on, and from his spoil the conqueror drove,—
And how in hideous rout the field they left,—
The Assyrians flying, and the Medes in chase.
Of what might else, unhappily, befall,
Long talk they held ; and admonition oft
Of caution gave she,—in the battle's heat,—
Well for her father so !—not all forgot.

Meantime, with all the chariots and the horse,
To turn the battle Salamenes flew.
Hideous the rout that toward them rushing came ;
Horses without their riders ;—cars o'erthrown,
Dragged by the terrified steeds ;—whole hosts in flight,
Their fear struck faces turning as they ran ;
And horsemen recklessly amid the throng
Forcing their headlong flight, and trampling down.

That seeing, Salamenes called aloud
And bade blow out the trumpets, the weak hearts
To strengthen, and the valiant to sustain :
Then to a captain of the Assyrian horse
Thus spake. Now haste Abijah ; with thee take
One half the horse ; and thou Abiathar
With half the chariots also haste away :
Touch ye no man, nor slack your speed at all ;
But o'er the plain a distant circuit make
Till on the right of that rebellious host
Ye shall arrive,—then, like a thunder-cloud,
Burst ye upon them : meantime with the rest,
The horsemen and the chariots, Asshur thou,
And Zimri, to the left speed rapidly,
And smite them also : full into the midst

Drive every chariot,—every horseman break
Into their ranks, and trample them like mire!—
But to the foot myself will hasten back,
And with them stay the rout.”

That said, his steed

In haste he turned, and flew along the plain :
With him a thousand horse ; but all the rest,
And all the chariots, even as he bade,
Half to the left hand, to the right hand half,
Moved instantly ; and loud the sound arose
Of tramlings, and the rush of brazen wheels.

Meantime, in headlong rout flew on the host,—
Fear in all hearts ;—and everywhere the cries
Went up—“ The king is slain !—the day is lost !—
Fly to the city, fly !—shut fast the gates !—
The king is slain !—fly to the city,—fly ! ”

But them, with twice a hundred thousand foot,
All hot for vengeance, Salamenes met,
And bade turn back to battle, crying aloud,
“ Shame on you cowards !—whither would you fly ?
Back on the foe !—the king of kings yet lives,

And comes again to battle ;—turn again !—
Strike every man but one—one valiant blow,—
And victory is ours ! ”

They heard him not,
Or did not heed ; for terror sank their hearts,
And wildly still they fled, amid his ranks
Mingling confusedly, that uproar strange
Began, and order to disorder grew.
To every side flew Salamenes then,
Exhorting and commanding ; threatening now,—
Now suing, now encouraging : in vain !—
Still rolled the headlong flood, and nought could stay
The fury of its course. Then, waving high
His glittering sword, out shouted he aloud,
And bade his soldiers shout, “ Long live the king !
Long live Sardanapalus, king of kings !
May the king live for ever ! ” At the word,
Upwent the roar of myriads ; and the hearts
Of those that fled grew bolder, and their shouts
Rose also ; over all the field the shouts
Spread like the peal of thunder. Answered then,
With shouts as loud, the conquering Median host,—
“ Assyria’s king is slain !—the king of kings

Hath fallen in the battle!—shout for joy!
'The tyrant is no more! the earth is free!'
That uproar, where the host of Jerimoth
Against the Babylonians fought, was heard;
And they too shouted,—every man sent up
Loud shouts; at which o'er all the plain arose
Redoubled clamours, roaring to the heavens,
That earth and sky seemed shaken.

Yet not long,

With wavering courage, did the Assyrians stand;
Then turned again to flight; for in their hearts
Their foes were stronger, and, for liberty,
Dared all things; but th' Assyrians, for a throne,
And for a tyrant, with a weaker arm
Stood in the battle, and from death shrank back.

But now, a little while, the scales of fight
Again were balanced; for Abiathar,
With half the chariots; and, with half the horse,
Abijah, on the right hand, suddenly,
Of the exulting Medes like tempest drove;
And, on the left, like to a counter blast,
Bringing destruction, Asshur with the horse;

And, with the chariots, Zimri. Furiously
Amid the ranks they burst, and, like a flood
Breaking its barriers, all before them bore,—
Hurling to earth, and trampling. Cries and groans,
And shouts of triumph, and derision rose :
The curse, the scornful laugh, the shriek of pain.

Deep in the Median host th' Assyrians drove,
And shouted " Victory !" but, anon, the spears
Howled round their heads,—huge stones upon them
smote,—
Arrows, steel-headed, like a hail-cloud came,
Bringing a darkness, and a sound of winds,
And death-groans where they pierced. Men fell, and
steeds,
And chariots in the throng stood motionless,—
Horses and charioteers upon the earth
Stretched lifeless. Many an arm that raised the lance
Sank, ere it parted, dead,—and many a bow,
Even while the strong arm strained the arrow up,
Dropt from a corpse,—and, in his swift career,
Full many a mailed steed that tore the ground,
Staggered, and fell,—fell dead. So raged the strife ;
And neither side prevailed.

But from pursuit,
That uproar hearing now, Arbaces stayed ;
And, in his chariot standing, looked behind,
And all the tumult saw. To Abner then :—
“ Haste,—turn the steeds ;—new onset have they made
With horse and chariots ;—lash the coursers on,
For rout is there.”

Swift, at the word, wheeled round
The strong-necked steeds,—the brazen wheels spun on ;
And, waving high his sword, his powerful voice
The Mede uplifted, and the chariots called,
And horsemen from pursuit.

The call was heard :
A thousand voices spread it ; and, at once,
Bright cars were glancing round, and foaming steeds,—
In full career stopt short,—their haughty crests,—
Like waves recoiling from the shaken cliff,—
Were seen upgathering. With impetuous sweep,
Backward then came they,—shouting as they flew,
And furious for the shock. Before them all,
Standing aloft, and pointing toward the foe,
Proudly Arbaces rode ; and, as he went,

On every side a warning shout sent forth,
To clear the dangerous way.

They now were nigh :—
Right on the foe, with headlong rush, they went,—
Upon th' Assyrian chariots, chariots drove,
And horse against their horse. Then rose to heaven
Clamours terrific ; shouts and cries went up :
Mailed horses clashed ; and brazen chariots shocked :
Arrows and lances hissed ; and swords, and helms,
Corslets, and shields, their iron chorus sang.

Ten thousand deeds heroic then were done,
Whereof no record tells ; yet endless fame
Not less deserving than the vaunted acts
Of kings and conquerors, in song renowned,
Or lying history, that praises still
Worst deeds of men, for bloody victories
Misnamed Great ; their gentler acts untold,
Or blamed for weakness. But eternal fame
Each hoped for now, and to the battle leaped ;
Greedy of death with honour : for their king,
And for Assyria's power and glory these ;

Those for their country's freedom, and their own ;
And to hurl down th' oppressor from his height,
And break his rod for ever.

Bravely then

Abijah and Abiathar, with voice,
And deed heroic, animating all,
Strove in the battle. Many a brazen dart,
And many a spear they threw,—and many a foe
Dashed to the earth, and trampled. Close they fought,
Each aiding each, and all encouraging ;
That round them furious was the strife, and sound
Of battle terrible.

That heard at length

Arbaces, where he fought. Upstanding then,
To Abner he. “ Curb now the steeds awhile,
That with a surer aim the death may fly
To yonder chiefs,—for dreadful is the rout
Made by their hands, nor must unpunished pass.”

Him Abner heard, and stayed the blowing steeds.
Arbaces, meantime, from his quiver took

A forked shaft ; three cubits was its length ;
Straight as a sunbeam : from an eagle's wing
The plume was plucked ; the gleaming head was steel,
Death destined ;—this took he, and, standing then
With his left foot advanced, his monstrous bow
Bent till the barb just touched upon the arch,—
Then let the fury go. Loud clanged the cord,
And shrill the arrow hissed, a hiss of scorn,
Proud of the death it bore. Abijah then,
His spear, fast rooted in a Persian's shield,
Strove to draw forth : upon his horse he sate,
But stooping, with both hands upon the shaft,
Labouring to drag it back. His foe, on foot,
Firm on his left arm held the baffling shield,
And, with the right, his sword extended still,
Aiming to wound : but still the horseman's spear
Thrust him away,—then forward drew again,—
That toilsome was the strife. But, as he bent,
The jointed armour in Abijah's neck
Opened, and death went in. With eye of fire,
And every muscle to the contest strained,
On his proud steed he sate,—then fell at once,—
For through his neck the arrow of the Mede
Drove to the plume :—even like a flower he fell,

Shorn by the mower's scythe ;—his limbs collapsed,—
His eyes were quenched,—he tumbled to the earth.

Upwent, from both the hosts, loud clamours then ;
Of joy from these,—from those of rage and fear ;
And towards the spot terrific was the rush
Of men and steeds, contesting for the slain.

That arrow shot Abiathar beheld,
And burned for vengeance. Instantly his eye
Glancing around, whence came the mortal shaft
At once he saw ; for, even as he stood
When from the fatal cord the pest had flown,
So, for a moment, watchful of its flight,
Still stood the Mede ; then raised the bow aloft,
And shouted. Wrathfully Abiathar
Answered the shout ; and bade his charioteer
Against him drive. His bow, meantime, he took,
And many a shaft, home drawn, against the Mede
Sent vengefully ; but widely erring most ;
For like the noise and tumult of the deep
Was now the rush and uproar of the fight :—
Nor could th' Assyrian's chariot in the midst
Advance, or stand. But, still on vengeance bent,

All other foes disdain, on the Mede
His eye he kept, and, ever and anon,
A shaft sent forth; nor always failed the mark;
Yet entrance could find none.

With dreadful shouts,
Arbaces, meantime, urged into the midst,
And hideous slaughter made: nor, where he went,
Stood any long resisting. Backward soon
The Assyrians fell: but still Abiathar
Exhorted to the fight, and in their hearts
The hope of vengeance woke, and victory.
And ever 'gainst the Mede his arrows poured,
Relentless; him the mark for every shaft
Conspicuous pointing out, that now a cloud
Of angry weapons round his chariot flew,
And ceaselessly upon his armour struck,
And on his charioteer, and on the steeds.

His eagle eye round glancing, in the car
Arbaces stood, and soon the head beheld
Of all that mischief. Grasping then his lance,
To Abner thus. "Right to yon foremost car
Lash on the horses now,—yet stay awhile,

For in the press are many valiant friends
Whom, hasting, we may crush ; but, when the throng
Shall leave us space, then let the horses go.
Meantime abide, and, safe beneath thy shield,
Laugh at this storm ; while, with the shafts and bow,
Myself now briefly try with yonder friends
Kind greetings to exchange."

Even while he spake,
From his loud clanging bow leaped forth a shaft,
That on the helmet of Abiathar
Touched like the glance of light ; yet harmlessly
Fell not, but in the breast a warrior pierced,
And from his proud height cast him. Headlong down
From his bright chariot, groaning, tumbled he,
With arms loud jarring.

That Abiathar
Beheld, and, wrathfully, unto the Gods
For vengeance called, and, while his bow he bent,
Still prayed aloud, " Oh ! in his rebel heart
Fix but this shaft,—then life or death to me
Deal as ye will." Thus he : but vainly all :
No arrow entrance found. Not so the shafts

Shot by the Mede ; for every arrow bore
Death on its wings ; and rapidly they flew
From his fell bow,—himself, the while, unhurt,
In his bright arms, empassive, standing up
The mark for every eye,—that fear at length
Fell on them, and some more than mortal power
Come down to fight they deemed.

Still, ceaselessly,
The twanging cord, the whirring shaft, was heard
From fierce Abiathar ;—for still hoped he
Some gate of passage, through those close barred arms,
Fortune might open, or some weaker part
His steel might pierce : but idle all his hope ;
Like sun rays from a mirror's polished face,
Glanced every shaft ;—and, dealing death around,—
Death dreading not himself,—the terrible Mede
Stood like a fortress.

But an arrow now,
Driven furiously, the brazen shield transpierced
Of Abner, and his hand, unguarded, stung.
Surprised and pained, the buckler he let fall ;
But in a moment, flushed with shame and rage,

Snapped short the shaft, and lifted it again,
For vengeance burning. Vengeance was at hand.
For, at that lucky hit, Abiathar,
Laughing aloud, cried out, with bitter scoffs
Reviling them. "What! hath it touched thee then?
Base rebel! would thy leader's traitorous heart
Had felt the blow instead! Thou likest it not?
Then with a surer mail thy body case,—
For not the honey of rebellion hope,
Without sometimes the sting."—

So he, and laughed;
And with him many. But the chosen shaft
Was taken forth; and darkened was the brow
Of the young hero, as the fatal bow
For death he bent. Still laughed Abiathar;—
But, laughing, groaned and fell,—headlong he fell,—
Spake not,—and struggled not,—for through his mail,
Burst with loud stroke the arrow of the Mede,
And in his heart stood fixed.

Pale terror then
Seized on the Assyrians: from the dreadful Mede,
Resistance making brief, they turned, and fled.

But, in his chariot rushing furiously,
Came Zimri; to Arbaces mortal foe:
In love, in war, in fame, his path he cross'd,
But stayed him never. On his fierce, dark face,
What maid would look, who on the godlike brow,
Gold clustered, and the radiant, deep blue eye,
Might gaze, of young Arbaces?—who his voice,
Discordant even when love the theme, would list,
That the rich music of Arbaces' breath
Might drink delighted?—Not Hamutah she!
In love defeated,—less in arms to hope
Had he; in every martial game and strife,
By the yet growing boy, his younger far,
Sore tried at first, soon matched, and quickly foiled,
Though strong, and other arm unfearing all.
How then before the man in strength mature,
The soldier never mated, might he stand?
Yet deadly hate his strong arm stronger made;
And with the Assyrians leagued him, eager more
His hated foe to crush, than from the yoke
His country free; for in Achmetha he,
The birth-place of Arbaces, first drew breath;
Nor of ignoble sires. But country, friends,

All ties of love, he scorned,—to bitterest hate
His heart resigning. Such was he who now,
Abiathar beholding, and the arm
By which he fell, even like a raging fire
Rushed on ; and, in his vengeful hand, the spear
Shook as he came. Swift as a tempest shot
His chariot by : he, passing, with full strength
His heavy lance hurled forth, and, as he threw,
Loud curses uttered,—with a madman's brow,
And bared teeth gnashing. Hastily drew back
Arbaces ; and the angry weapon passed,
Fierce as a hornet, close beneath his arm
His steel side grazing. Instantly a shaft
In answer sent he : but far off the car
By the mad steeds was rapt ; nor turned again.
Still looking back, the frantic Zimri stood,
With voice and arm uplifted, threatening still,
And calling on the Gods,—till in the host
Mingling, he passed.

Him answered not the Mede,
Other reply intending, when fit time
Should, for his many crimes, the madman bring

To bitter payment,—but the flying host
With shouts pursued, chariots and horsemen mixed
In tumult terrible.

Upon the plain

A mound there stood,—perchance of some old tower
The mouldered wreck,—though of hewn stone, or clay
Hardened by fire or sun, the work of man,
No trace appeared,—nor that bituminous earth,
Scarce perishable, wherewith thy huge walls,
Old Babylon, they builded : or the tomb,
Perchance it was, of some great conqueror,
Far back, when earth was young, whose dread renown
Should, as was thought, to its old age live on :—
Whatever thing, all was forgotten now ;
But there it stood, and far along the plain
Gave prospect. From his car alighting then,
Up ran Arbaces, and his eye cast round
O'er all the battle.

As, on some small rock

Amid the stormy deep, the mariner,
Looking all round, the raging waves doth see
Outstretched immense, and their tremendous roar,

Deep and far spreading, hears,—even such a sea,
A sea whose billows were contending hosts,
Arbaces saw,—and, louder than the voice
Of stormy ocean, heard the uproar there.
He saw, and shouted; for, o'er all the plain,
Like waves before a strong wind driven along,
The Assyrians moved; yet unresisting not;—
For, as against the wind the rapid tide
Strives still, though yielding still; its rebel waves
Against the mightier tempest lifting up,
Though to be whelmed again,—so, while they fled,
Fought still th' Assyrians; turning oft again,
And onset still renewing, still to fail.
Like to the tossing foam amid the waves,
The plume-topt helmets rocked; and restless light,
As from the waters heaving to the sun,
From the steel corslets flashed, and burning shields,
The glittering armour all, and cars of brass.

O'er all the plain such sight the Mede beheld;
Save only where,—like to a rocky ridge
Scarce seen above the waves, but, by the roar,
And by the billows broken and thrown back,
Known to the mariner,—stood firmly yet,

With Salamenes, the fresh infantry,
Him to assault flew next the exulting Mede :
Yet first, across the field, a searching look
Cast anxiously, if, of the other hosts,
With Abdolonimus and Jerimoth,
Aught might be seen : but still at distance they
Held furious contest ; and the burning sun
From out the gasping earth a hazy breath
Had drawn, that on the horizon trembling hung,
Dimming the bloody spot. With earnest gaze,
Awhile he looked,—if either host in flight
Moving, or in pursuit, he might descry ;
But, of that mighty multitude in arms,
Nought saw he ; a dim twinkling mass alone,
Atoms of light in mist. Then down he strode ;
Sprang to his chariot, and with shouts led on.

Bravely did Salamenes on that day
In battle bear him : but his soldiers' hearts
Were lukewarm, and his enemies' like fire.
Undaunted in defeat,—by toil unworn,—
With voice, and valiant act, inciting still
To die or conquer, everywhere flew he.

But vain his toil,—his valour all in vain :
Still toward the city, with unbating rush,
Flowed on the living deluge ; and to heaven
Went up the roar appalling of its waves.

So, till the fiery horses of the sun
The burning wheels down heaven's eternal bridge
Three parts had whirled, the double battles raged ;
Then in one joined : for, on all sides driven back,
The Assyrians fled, and toward the city rushed.
Fierce as a madman rending at his chains,
Raged Jerimoth, with hoarse voice ceaselessly
Roaring to stay the flight ; but, like the scream
Of eagle to the tempest, was it lost :
And on his spearmen Ahaz called amain,—
And on his horsemen Adriel : but their hearts
Were terror-stricken, and their arms were weak ;—
For, in his lofty car, bareheaded still,
From rank to rank flew on the fire-eyed priest,—
To heaven still pointed,—bade them call on God,—
And on their foes the frenzied soldiers urged :—
And, with his chariots, Abdolonimus
Drove on them crushing ;—and the Arabian horse

Trod them like grass ;—and with the arrow storm,
Shot after them, the howling air was dark.—
So in one mighty flood commixed fled they.

Meantime, upon his bed, Assyria's king,
Unconscious of the rout, slept heavily.
Beside him sat the queen, and from his brow
The cold sweat wiped ; and on his pallid face
Gazed anxiously ; and toward the plain her eye
Oft turned ; and many a silent prayer sent up,
The battle fearing. Far away, at first,
Nought saw she, save a stir and flash of arms :
But louder every hour, and louder yet,
The uproar came, and nigher to the walls.
Still in a heavy slumber lay the king,
Nor dared she rouse him. But, ere long, foul rout
And havoc hideous she espied : the shouts,—
The cries,—the bray of arms,—the sullen roll
From all the trembling plain, by foot of steeds,
And men, and chariot wheels smote furiously,
Louder and deeper came :—Assyria's throne
Seemed falling,—and her monarch wounded lay,
And could not help :—what could her hapless queen ?
Upon the king she looked, and on the field :

A host of thoughts conflicting in her rose,
And, with her heart communing, thus she said.
“ What hour is this?—what dreadful fate is near?
Is then Assyria’s empire passing by?—
Her throne of fifteen hundred years to fall?—
Is that her dreaded monarch,—on his couch,
Bleeding and pale, stretched by a rebel’s arm,—
Whose breath, but yesterday, could wield the swords
Of millions? Shall I rouse him from his trance?
But what avail?—Could he go forth to fight?
No,—he is weak,—his countenance is pale,—
Hurried his breathing,—and his clenched hands
Give sign of troubled sleep, and inward ail;—
He must not to the battle;—but what then?
Is there no help? How awful is yon roar!
Be merciful, great Gods! still come they on:—
The plain is all on fire beneath their arms;—
Their shoutings mock the thunder. Fall quick night,
With heaviest clouds, and stay this bloody rout,
That the red hand may not the victim see,
And be perforce made still! Oh! ye good heavens!
Ye too are angry, and dark frowns put on,—
Ye gather thunders now: hurl! hurl them down!
Outroar yon roarings!—fling your hottest fires

In the fierce faces of yon impious foes !
Pour down your torrents, till yon arid plain
Turns to a lake sea-deep, to gulf them all,
Rebellious !—that at length they may be taught
The punishment to traitors that is due !—
But hark !—hark !—Powers Eternal aid us now !—
Nigher the tempest comes,—the gates ere long
Will not resist their fury.—Yet remain
Within the city four score thousand men,—
They must go forth.—Upon my head the blame !”

These thoughts within her moving, forth she went,
And, to a soldier of the household guard,
Briefly thus spake. “ Haste to Sennacherib,
And to him say, ‘ Thus wills Assyria’s king.
Let him his four score thousand fighting men
Lead instantly from out the eastern gate,
And turn the battle : meantime will the king
His arms put on, and issue also forth ;—
So to the host proclaim it, that their hearts
May yet be strengthened to tread down the foe.’
Haste, and be true.” So she,—then turned away,
And to another thus. “ To Dara thou ;—
Bid him the chariot of the king prepare,

For yet he will go forth : speed then away,
 And to the captain of the guard say thus :
 ‘ Have ready thou thy horsemen, every man,—
 Let not one man be missing of them all,—
 And by the palace, at the eastern gate,
 Abide the coming of Assyria’s king ;
 For to the battle goeth he again.’ ”
 So she ; then to the chamber hasted back.

Her met Nehushta, with pale face aghast,
 And tearful eyes. Her mother’s hand she clasped,
 Looked up to heaven, and thus. “ All,—all is lost !
 Fly !—fly—dear mother !—like the rage of fire
 They come along, and nothing can resist.—
 Hark ! hark ! Oh God ! Oh God ! that hideous roar !
 Tigers and lions are they, and not men !
 Our bravest soldiers tremble, and their arms
 Are blighted by their looks. A cloud of horse,—
 To ’scape too happy,—through the gates have rushed,
 Bloody, and wild with fright ; nor threat, nor gold,
 Can move them to return. ‘ Assyria’s fate
 Is come !’ they cry—‘ the Gods decree her doom !
 Fallen is Assyria ! fallen is her pride !
 The rebel’s foot shall trample her to dust !

Fallen is Assyria, and her king is fallen !
His blood is on the earth !—So cry they still ;
And still they point toward the lurid sky,
And tell of voices heard from out the clouds,—
And bloody drops that rained upon the earth,—
A shower of blood. And through the city go
Prophets that prophesy Assyria's doom,—
Strange men, unseen before,—and still they cry,—
' Fallen is the mighty city ! fallen, fallen !—
Fallen is great NINEVEH,—the city of old,—
The mighty city,—queen of all the earth !—
Her throne is in the dust ! her sceptre broke !
Her walls are blackened ashes ;—her renown
Is passed away !—her palaces are gone !—
Her riches, gold and silver, precious stones,
Fine linen, silk, and costly merchandize,
Her Ashres, and her Cherubim of gold,—
All, all have passed away !—the spoiler's hand
Hath taken them,—and led her daughters forth
To be for captives, and her sons for slaves !
Fallen is great NINEVEH, the city of old !
Fallen is the mighty city !'—So cry they,
Lifting their hands to heaven ; and, as they cry,
The multitude cry also,—to and fro

Walking, and weeping,—‘ Mighty NINEVEH !
Oh thou great city, NINEVEH ! bow down,—
Thy hour of desolation is at hand !’—
And on the city walls a voice of wail
Is heard, for there the old, the young, the weak,
The women, and the men that go not forth
To battle, stand to gaze upon the plain,
And cry to Heaven, and weep, and wail aloud,
Rending their hair, and smiting on their breasts,
For terror of the fury of the foe.—
Fly then, dear mother, fly ! My father wake,
If yet he slumbers ;—from the city fly,—
Bid forth the chariots,—let no hour be lost,—
Lest in the hands of those terrific men
We be delivered, when no help is nigh.”

So she, her eyes fast streaming ; and to her
The queen replied. “ Beloved daughter, peace !
Danger is near us, but despair far off.
Who meanly flies, draws oft the peril on
From which he flies ;—the brave man, by the brave,
May be defeated,—cowards stoop to all.
One day of rout seals not Assyria’s doom :
Her brazen gates are strong,—her walls are high,—

Her armies, though defeated, numerous still,—
Her riches endless, cowards to make bold.
Nor is the strife yet o'er, nor battle lost :
The stormy day hath oft a smiling eve ;
And he that boasts his victory at noon,
Ere sunset may fly howling. Calm thee then ;—
Fresh troops are going forth,—the city's guard,
With strong Sennacherib : the wearied foe
Hath no reserve,—no breathing from his toil,—
And must relax : the day, too, is far spent,
And, with the night, he must perforce retire,—
Or burst the gates. But, when thy father's car
Shall once again be seen upon the field ;
And he whom they think slain there sitting still,
Then shall the weakest arm grow strong again,—
The vanquished shall be victors,—the pursued
Become pursuers,—and the tiger foe,
Who thinks the hind even now within his spring,
Shall find the lion there. Thy father sleeps
A troubled sleep, nor, save at utmost need,
Dare I arouse him : let Sennacherib
Go first, and prove his valour on the foe ;
That failing,—hard to think,—upon the stake
All must be peril'd. Meantime, clear thy brow ;—

What is to come, will be, the best, or worst,—
And we must bear it: a resolved breast
Is as a coat of steel, 'gainst which the darts
Of fortune strike, and pierce not; cowardice
Is naked to the meanest insect's sting,
And shrinks at every breath."

That said, she ceased,
And, with Nehushta, to the king returned.
The chamber as they entered, a light foot
In swift retreat they heard, a closing door
Beheld, and a thin garment, white as snow,
That vanished without noise. Still slept the king:
Azubah had but watched when none was there;
And, like a shadow at th' approaching morn,
Fled from the purer presence. Heavily,
By the strong drug subdued, the monarch slept:
Yet was his countenance, as by a dream,
Troubled. Above him leaned the queen awhile,
Anxiously gazing: but the battle's roar
Louder and louder rose, and to the field
Again she turned her eye. With thunder-clouds
The sky was darkening round: large drops, wide spread,
Fell heavily: hot as a tiger's breath,

Panted the thick air : still upon the plain
Raged the convulsive struggle. With pale check,
The queen beheld ; and oft upon the king
Irresolute glances cast, awaiting still
The onset of Sennacherib. An hour
Of terror, and of silent agony,
There sat they gazing : but the battle-flood
Nigher, and nigher came : within the shade
Of the huge walls stood half the combatants ;
For to his goal the sun was hasting now,
And through the massive clouds a lurid ray
Poured like a fire. Once more upon the king
She looked :—his face was pale, his breathing quick :—
She dared not stir him. But Assyria's fate
Upon that moment lay. Then in her heart,—
“ I will myself go forth,”—she said. “ Of old
Went not Semiramis, the beauteous queen,
First in the battle, over all the east
Marching triumphant ? When a woman's foot
Advances to the fight, what man will dare
To play the coward ? When their queen leads on,
They must, for shame, be brave. The golden shield,—
The helmet of the king, I will put on ;
And in his chariot ride. These from the gates

Once issuing seen, haply the king himself
I may, far off, be deemed : a million men,
Now weak and trembling, will wax giants then ·
What though, in hero's mail, a woman's heart
Shall be concealed,—his spirit will have flown
Into their spirits ; and the blow be struck
Ere the delusion cease.”

Across her mind,
Rapid as lightning, shot the noble thought :
Her fine eye glanced,—her pale face proudly blushed,—
And, to her daughter whispering, thus she said
“ Go now, beloved child ; the king anon
Will waken, and, perchance, to find thee here,
May be incensed. To thy own chamber go ;
And, as thou may'st, be calm ; for God, than man,
Is mightier still ; in him our help must be.”

That said, her daughter's pallid cheek she kissed,
And pressed her to her heart.—No word replied
The trembling girl ; but her loved mother clasped
Convulsively, and, weeping, went her way.

Then on the king once more Atossa looked,

And on the field. The king in troubled sleep
Lay yet;—like an outrageous fire, the field
Gave out redoubled roarings,—grimly dark
Beneath the thunder-roof. With trembling limbs,—
But with resolved heart,—the gleaming helm
Upon her head she bound,—the golden shield
Braced on her arm,—a spear, steel headed, seized,—
And with light step, but firm, was hasting forth,—
When, suddenly, the heavens were opened wide,
And the chained lightnings loosed. Like a hot blast,
Upon her face it came,—a flood of light,—
And, with the light, hoarse thunder that the walls
To their foundations shook. Upsprang the king,
Shouting, for of the battle was his dream :
Wild and amazed, upon his feet he sprang,
Staggering and pale. The queen against the wall
Leaned faint and dizzy,—on her dazzled eyes
Her white hand pressing. With his helm, and spear,
And shield equipt, when her the king beheld,—
Aloud he cried—“ Where am I?—who art thou?
Atossa? what strange frenzy—God of all !
The battle ! hark ! ”

While speaking yet, he ran,

And, looking forth, the hideous rout beheld
Nigh to the walls; then, with an angry voice,
“ Woman! Oh! woman! thou hast lost the world!
Why didst thou let me sleep?”

“ Nay—nay—” she cried,—
“ Now chide me not,—thy chariot is prepared,—
Thy guards await thee;—if upon thy brow
Thou canst the helmet place,—and if thy limbs
Will bear thee to the battle,—go thou forth;—
Or, if thou canst not,—lo: am I prepared,
And will not falter!”

With a sudden bound,
Sprang on the king, and strained her in his arms,
And on her cheek one burning kiss impressed:
The bandage from his head then plucked away,—
The glittering helmet seized,—the golden shield,—
The spear,—and issued forth. She after him
Went swiftly, crying still—“ Nay—go not thus,—
Put on thy mail,—think what on thee depends,—
A million blows will fall when thou shalt strike,—
A million wounds be felt when thou shalt bleed,—
At least thy hauberk take—Oh! be not mad!”

Nought heeded he, for in his ear the noise
Of battle rang,—all other sound unheard :
Forth went he,—to his chariot, shouting, leaped ;—
Shrill hissed the scourge ;—like bended bows let go,
Started the steeds ;—the rushing wheels streamed fire ;—
Earth thundered underneath.

A thousand men,

His chosen guard,—all eminent in arms,—
Of proud Assyria's noble youth the flower,—
On Arab steeds with gorgeous trappings decked,
His coming waited. Dazzling were their arms,
Silver, and gold, and steel, and gleaming brass,—
And helmets, gem-bossed, that in the blood-red sun,
Streamed fiery splendour. When the king appeared,
At once their restless horses they let go ;
And, like a tempest, close behind his wheels,
Rode shouting to the battle.

But the queen

Returned not to her chamber : she a car
Bade forth, and to the watch-tower flew again,
To gaze upon the fight.

Dire rout, meantime,
 Pursued th' Assyrians ; nor Sennacherib
 Long time delayed it. Furiously at first
 Into the field he rushed,—and, as he went,
 Cried ceaselessly, and with him all his host,—
 “ Long live the king ! long live Assyria's king !
 He to the battle will anon come forth,—
 To battle will the king come forth anon .
 Long live Sardanapalus, king of kings !
 May the king live for ever ! ”

To that shout,
 Spake in derision all the Median host,
 Crying aloud—“ Assyria's king is slain !
 He to the battle will no more come forth !
 To battle will the king come forth no more !
 The king of kings is to his palace gone !
 His chamber is the grave ! his robe a shroud !
 His kingdom is the pit ! shout every voice,—
 The tyrant is no more ! the earth is free ! ”
 So host 'gainst host they shouted ; and the heavens
 Thundered continually.

With fury fired,
Thus crying, toward the Medes Sennacherib
Through the thick rout pressed on ; and still called out,
And bade them turn again ; “ Oh ! bitter shame !
Fly not like women !—rather die like men !—
Turn,—turn,—and strike :—the king is coming forth,—
Let not the king of kings behold your shame !
Turn to the fight again,—turn back with me,—
Conquest invites you,—hasten to her call,—
Or fly to shame, and perish as ye fly !”

So he, against the rushing of the rout,
Struggling unceasingly. But few his voice
Heard in the uproar,—and his toils seemed vain.
Yet bravely he, with all his host, awhile
Stood in the battle, and the onset checked.

New hope recovering then, from rank to rank
Flew Salamenes, striving in all hearts
Courage to waken, and contempt of death.
Upon the foremost Medians still he flew :
Last to retire,—the readiest to advance,—
A hundred deaths he dared : Nebaioth too,
At his right hand, like a young lion, fought,

Bayed by the hounds ; and, like a hurricane,
 Roared Jerimoth, with his mailed horses still
 Rushing to fight,—and, like devouring fire,
 Burned Zimri,—underneath his chariot wheels
 Friends and foes crushing, madman ! in his rage.

But nought the Assyrians' sunken hearts could lift :
 Their cry was still—" The king of kings is slain !
 Fly to the city ! close the brazen gates !
 Fly to your walls, ye men of NINEVEH !
 The day is lost ! shed not your blood in vain !
 Haste to your bulwarks, ye Assyrians, haste !
 God for the rebel fights,—our foe is Heaven,—
 Fly to the city—fly !"

So cried they out ;
 For, like a fire, Arbaces in their rear
 Awfully raged,—and terror from his eyes,
 And with his voice, into their hearts infused,
 Their strength consuming. In his chariot now
 Upon their chariots drove he, and their horse,—
 Leaped now to earth, and in the thickest throng
 Pursued the foe ; and, arm to arm, was none
 That could before him stand. Belesis too,—

Still in his priestly robes, bareheaded still,
Even as at morn into the fight he rushed,—
Far o'er the field was seen ; nor fear had he
Of mortal weapon, for his trust was God :
And still to heaven he pointed, and cried out
Unceasingly, “ On, men of Babylon !
Into your hands hath God delivered them !
The day of her destruction is at hand !
Yon haughty city ye shall burn with fire,—
And break her gates of brass,—and throw her walls
Flat to the ground,—and trample on her throne,—
And burst her chains that held the nations down ;
And raze her deep foundations utterly,—
And wipe her from the earth ; for she hath been
Abominable in her wickedness,—
Earth heaveth at her, and will cast her forth,—
God shall destroy her ! Men of Babylon,
Slack not your arms, nor let your hearts be weak,—
Drive them before you ! rush into the gates !
Fling fire within her walls ! hark ! hark ! Heaven speaks,—
Heaven calls in thunder,—see ! the flaming bolt,—
Look ! look ! the wall is riven,—the ruin falls !
God bids you on ! God frowns upon the foe !
The sky is darkening underneath his wrath ;—

His fiery arrows is he shooting forth,—
The tempest of his anger is let loose,—
He shall destroy them utterly ! On ! On !
Rush to the gates, ye men of Babylon !
Proud NINEVEH's destruction is at hand,—
The day of her exulting is gone by !
Heed not the sword, the arrow, nor the spear,—
Heed not their chariots, nor their mailed steeds,—
Heed not their captains, nor their bravery ;—
God is your captain,—God is your defence,—
Your shield is Heaven;—Shout, men of Babylon !
Shout out aloud, and say, ' Great NINEVEH !
The day of thy destruction is at hand ! ' ”

So he, and in the hearts of all who heard
Fury infused, and strength invincible.
And Abdolonimus, as with the rush
Of billows overbreaking, on the foe
Drove with his chariots : and the Arabian horse
Swept like a whirlwind : and the hoarse loud voice
Of stern Rabsaris rose amid the din,
Still for the tyrant calling—“ Where art thou ?
Where hidest thou thy head, foul ravisher ?
Come forth,—Rabsaris summons thee,—come forth,—

Come from thy den, black, shameless wolf ! thy friend,—
Thy friend invites thee,—to the feast come now,—
The table is set out,—the host awaits,—
Haste to my arms, dear friend,—why lingerest thou ?
Haste,—haste,—and let me clasp thee.”

So cried he,

Bitterly mocking. But the king, far off,
Heard not,—to battle driving furiously.
Oft to the sky looked he, and toward the plain,—
Hearing the thunder, and the din of fight,—
And backward to the sinking sun looked oft ;
And for the eagle's pennons vainly longed,
Or speed of winds, that he the fatal blow
Might yet turn by. Foam-covered flew the steeds,—
The whirling wheels, fire rapt, roared ceaselessly.

But now the rout, by brave Sennacherib
Awhile delayed, with madder frenzy fled.
He his far mightier in the conflict met,—
Arbaces,—and, with fury filled, his spear
Hurled at him, shouting. On his golden shield
The Mede, unharmed, the angry weapon caught ;
Then, from his chariot leaping, swift as wind,

Rushed on th' Assyrian. At his coming fled,
Like deer before the lion, the scared foes,
All save Sennacherib : he, dauntless, stood,
Though from that terrible arm, with life to 'scape,
Scarce hoping : his broad shield on high upraised,—
His sword drew forth, and, lifting up his voice,
Cried out, "Haste, haste, Assyrians ! hither haste !
The fierce arch rebel comes ! the traitor chief !
Upon him every man !"

That shout the ears
Of Salamenes and Nebaioth reached ;
And through the press their steeds at once they urged,
Calling aloud. But on Sennacherib
Fell, like a thunder-bolt, the dreadful Mede ;
For his lost sword, a heavy battle-axe
In his strong right hand shaking. Shield, or helm,
Breast-plate, or corslet, of whatever proof,
Before that arm, and weapon, weak and vain !
The gleaming engine high above his head,
Shuddering, Sennacherib saw,—and, to avert,
His brazen buckler held ; but on the earth,
Struck as by lightning, instantly dropt down :
Right through the shield, as through thin ice, the axe

Irresistibly burst,—the helmet smote askant,—
Glanced,—and passed off:—as with a cymbal's ring,
From the steel casque it glanced, and made no wound :
But, with the jar and shock, even like a stone,
Senseless th' Assyrian fell. A second stroke,
Upon a fallen foe, the Mede disdain'd ;
And to his chariot leaped : but, as he rose,
Looking around him, Salamenes saw
And young Nebaioth, eager for revenge,
Right toward him rushing ; and, behind them close,
Horsemen and chariots. Instantly his bow
Snatched he, and with a hasty aim, a shaft
Upon the chiefs let fly. With arm upraised,
His followers with loud clamours cheering on,
Shaking a brazen dart, Nebaioth came :
Just on the elbow's tip the arrow struck,
Grazing the bone. Down fell his arm benumbed ;—
The idle dart, from his relaxing hand,
Dropt tinkling ; and, all helpless he remained,
To every chance exposed. Yet still his voice
Uplifted he, and bade th' Assyrians on,
And promised victory still.

That arrow-stroke

Saw Salamenes, and his lance upraised,
Vengeance intending : but, of his loved friend
Regardful, to him thus. “ Now get thee back,—
Speed from the field, Nebaioth, while thou may'st ;
Thou canst not aid us, wounded as thou art,
And surely wilt be slain ;—haste then away,
While, to revenge thee, I the traitor meet :
Fly ! I command thee, fly ! ”

While yet he spake,
Lifting his lance, his foaming horse he drove
Right toward the Mede. But in their mid career,
Rider and steed fell headlong. Coming on,
The Mede beheld them ; and his monstrous spear
Hurled. On the throat the noble horse it struck ;—
Through the strong brazen mail, with hideous crash,
Burst,—and sank deep. Down fell he, dead ;—fell down
With dreadful clang his mailed rider too ;—
The useless lance let go, with out-spread hands,
Head foremost, to the horses of the Mede,
Even 'gainst their feet he fell. The bruised steeds
Started aside, and with the car ran round.

From both the hosts terrific clamours then

Went up ; the Medes exulting, but their foes
Fear-struck and sorrowing. To flight turned these,
Calling aloud, “ Fly,—fly,—Assyrians, fly !
Speed to your walls,—your leader is no more,—
Brave Salamenes is no more,—fly—fly !
Heaven is against us ! ”

But the Medes rushed on,
And shouted ceaselessly, “ Rejoice ! rejoice !
Into our hands hath God delivered them !
The tyrant, and the captains of his host,
Hath he thrown down, and cast into the pit !
On to the city now ! the day is ours !
The tyrant and his chosen ones are fallen !
On to the city—on !

So they. Meantime,
Arbaces, shouting, from his chariot leaped ;
And from the earth,—slight load to arm so strong,—
The fallen Assyrian raised, and to his car
Hasted to bear him.—But Nebaioth now,
That sight beholding, vehemently called,
Exhorting to the rescue. “ On—rush on !
Strike down the rebel ! save your noble chief !

Let him not perish ! leave him not the spoil
Of the black traitor ! Oh that this right arm
Were what it was, then should one faithful sword
Strike to redeem him,—haste ere yet too late !
On ! every man rush on !”

Incited thus,
Toward the Mede a cloud of horsemen rushed,
With spear and falchion ;—but, to aid him, flew
As many ; and the tumult round him raged.

He, meantime, in a chariot that drew nigh,
His load laid down, and to the charioteer
Spake briefly thus, “ Now, with thy utmost speed,
Haste from the press, Hilkiah ;—slack his helm,
And give him air ;—but, on thy life, take heed
That he escape not ;—haste ! away—away !

So he, and, bounding like an antelope,
Ran to his car,—up leaped,—another spear
Seized,—and to Abner thus, “ Turn now the steeds,
And drive into the midst,—the hour is come !”
Then, with tremendous voice, unto the host,
Upstanding, cried, “ Now onward every man !

The arm of God is with us ! to the gates
Rush onward now ! the city shall be ours !
Her tyrant is destroyed ! her captains fall !
Her hour of doom is nigh ! her last sun sinks !
The wrath of the Almighty is gone forth !
Hark ! hark ! Heaven calls you ! To the gates ! the gates !”

Toward the black, thunderous ceiling pointing up,
Thus shouted he, and in th' Assyrian host
Poured terror. For a time, Nebaioth strove
Their hearts to strengthen, with redoubled cries
Urging them on, and, toward Hilkiab's car,
Pointing, and pressing forward ; but, ere long,
Borne to the earth, rider and horse down fell ;
And, from the trampling hoofs when he escaped,
Bruised and staggering, to a car he climbed ;
Bowed down his head, and swooned.

Now hideous rout
O'er all the field was seen : toward the gates
Terrific was the rush ; nor longer strove
The Assyrian captains for that hopeless day ;
But, sullenly resisting, with the throng,—
Like lions by a swoln stream borne away,—

In a stern silence struggling, backward went.
No voice they lifted, for no ear could hear,—
So cried the vanquished,—so the victors stormed,—
So roared the thunders : step by step they went,—
Blow for blow dealing, yet despairing still.

Wide stood the brazen gates : with thronging heads
The walls were thick. Women were there, with hands
Uplifted to the Gods ; and grey-haired men,
Their withered arms outstretching toward the plain ;
Children, and beardless youths, and maidens pale.

From the great central eastern portal now,
The foremost of the rout, an arrow's flight,
Were distant scarce,—chariots, and horse, and foot,
Mingled confusedly, that, in the gate,
Hideous and bloody would have been the crush.
Jaded with toil,—with sweat and dust begrimed,—
Panting for breath,—for thirst agape, they came ;—
The glittering cars,—the gay caparisons,—
The shining arms,—the plumes of gorgeous hue,—
Blood-spattered,—fouled with dust ;—with such a rout
Fled they ; and, after them, the shouting foe,
Driving them on, and trampling. Toward the walls

All eyes were bent ; for succour hoping, these,—
These for unbounded vengeance,—when, behold !
Swift as an eagle shooting from a cloud,
From out the gates a single chariot rushed !
Erect the rider stood,—a golden shield
Upon his left arm grasping,—in his right
A spear,—and on his head a gleaming helm,—
All else unarmed. The royal car was known,—
The ebon seat,—the steeds of snowy white,—
The wheels, gem-starred ;—but who was he that rode ?
Shouting he flew, and raised his arms on high.
Swift as a tempest came the thundering car ;
And, close behind, on Arab steeds milk white,
Assyria's royal guard. Burst out, at length,
A deafening shout—“ The king ! the king comes forth !
The king of kings unto the battle comes !
Shout all ye nations ! shout ! the king ! the king !
The king of kings to victory comes again !
The haughty rebels he shall overthrow !
Our foes shall be trod down ! Shout every man ;
Shout out aloud ! and lift th' avenging sword,
For now their hour is come ! ”

From host to host

Flew on the cry,—from tower to tower it flew,—
 And every heart that for Assyria stood
 Grew bold,—and every wearied arm waxed strong:—
 And every eye flashed light. The vanquished turned
 Upon the vanquishers,—the hunted prey
 On the fierce hunter turned,—the cry of fear
 To calls of vengeance changed,—the conqueror's shout
 Sank into silence,—and the lion heart
 Panted with sudden awe.

As, when a fire
 Devours the forest, and a strong wind blows;
 The roaring flames above the tall trees bow,
 And, with unnumbered burning hands outstretched,
 The green, umbrageous heads, resistlessly
 Do seize and blacken;—which way blows the storm,
 There darkness flies, and smoke,—and, in pursuit,
 Fierce fire, and splendour:—if the tempest then,
 In moody madness, backward doth return,—
 Then backward too the fiery deluge rolls;—
 Where brightness was, lo! smoke and darkness now!
 Where darkness and thick smoke, fierce fire and light!—
 Even so, before the strong, exulting Mede,
 The Assyrians fled,—even so the battle storm

Veered backward,—and the victors turned to flight,—
The vanquished chased the victors.

With a shout,
Louder than thunders, all that mighty host
Turned suddenly, and on th' astonished Medes,
Drove like a hurricane. They,—amazed and stunned,—
Heard, saw, and wavered ;—for, as one to four,
Their numbers were,—their limbs with toil were worn,—
They had no walls of refuge. All amazed,
There stood they doubtfully ;—then looked behind,—
Looked,—turned,—and fled.

Redoubled clamours then
O'er all the field arose ; and, from the walls,
The cries of myriads. Shrieks of joy went up,—
Songs of thanksgiving,—loud and frenzied prayers,—
Shoutings, and sobs, and wails, and laughter loud.
Women, and priests, infants, and grey-haired men,
Ran to and fro ; or on their knees fell down,
With hands and eyes uplifted to the Gods,—
For their deliverance praising,—on their foes,
Destruction calling down.

The king, meantime,
Rushed to the slaughter. On the flying rear,
Chariots and horsemen drove ;—spears, arrows, darts,
Hissed after them ;—like to a thunder-peal,
Heard faintly from afar, amid the din
Was heard the voice of Jerimoth ;—the roar
Of furious Zimri, like a tiger's howl
In the deep forest, when a tempest shakes
The moaning trees at night.

But, as a rock
Amid a thousand waves, Arbaces stood,
And dashed away, like foam, the rushing foes.
O'er every other sound his shout went forth,
Urging to battle: every chief he called,—
He called on every nation. Like a rock,
Now stood he, and threw back the bursting waves,—
Now,—like a gallant ship, with straining sails,
And proud beak lifted high,—above them rode,
Scorning their fury. And the fire-eyed priest,
Upraised his voice, and called upon the Gods;
Adjuring, threatening, and exhorting all:
Bare-headed, and unarmed still, he rode,

'Through every peril dreadless : everywhere
Rushed he, and bade the fliers turn again,
And promised victory still. But now his voice
Waxed hoarse with shouting, and all ears were deaf.
Nor Abdolonimus, nor Azareel,
Nor dark Rabsaris, could the panic stay,—
Nor every valiant captain of the host,—
For on all hearts the terror had gone forth,
And every arm was weak. So fled they on ;
And so the foe pursued.

But darkness now
Fell rapidly ; and the big clouds, o'ercharged,
Poured down their waters. Over all the sky
The dark arch thickened,—and the thunders spake
Louder and deeper to the quickening bolts.
Still in pursuit the furious king drove on :
But,—of his promise mindful, in the bower
To loved Nehushta given,—with fervent prayer,
And admonition frequent, Dara him
From peril imminent still strove to turn ;
Nor strove at length in vain. But, though from fight,
Ill armed as he was, and feeble still,
Wisely himself refrained, yet to pursue

And slay still called he ; for his brother's fate,
Fallen, as he deemed, or captive, maddened him ;
That, recklessly, into the thickest fight,—
All admonition flinging to the winds,—
Longed he to plunge.

But Salamenes now,
Unharm'd, amid the van of battle rode,
Hilkiah's horses ruling, while their lord
Upon the field lay slain. From his long trance
Recovering, he the altered conflict found ;
The Assyrians heard triumphant, and the Medes
Routed and flying. Motionless awhile
Yet lay he,—for deliverance hoping soon,—
And to the battle listed anxiously,
And to his captors' voices, as, with hearts
Sore troubled, from the hopeless field they flew.
But, when his limbs ungyved he found, and strength
Returned unto him, he no longer paused ;
But, as Hilkiah backward looking stood,
Sprang,—and, a brazen javelin snatching up,
Upon the temple smote the charioteer,
That to the earth he sank : Hilkiah next,
In the same instant, by the crest he seized,

And bowed him back, and cast him to the ground ;
With violence cast him, that beneath the wheels,
Struggling, he fell, and died. The fallen reins
Upsnatching then, with quick glance o'er the field
The Assyrian looked ; and,—his on-coming friends,
Not far away beholding,—raised his voice,
And in the battle mingled. At that cry,
Up went a shout triumphant ; and his name,
From host to host, through all the fight was borne.
The tidings glad Assyria's monarch heard
Rejoicing, and called out, “ Blow, trumpets, blow !
And let the battle cease, lest friend, by friend,
May in the darkness perish.”

At the word,

A single trumpet its clear summons blew ;
A thousand joined, and their loud clangours sent
Up to the answering clouds. The giant walls
Echoed the din ; and from the city rose
Shoutings triumphant. Like an ocean's roar,
O'er all the plain ran then the joyful cry,
Proclaiming victory ;—and the trumpets too
Spake out again in long exulting notes,
Defiance sending : but unanswered not ;—

For, from the Medes, came back a resolute shout ;
And trumpets to the Assyrian trumpets spake,
Defiance breathing still.

Turned now the hosts
From conflict both ; for, with redoubled rage,
The storm came on : in torrents fell the rain,—
The wind arose,—the lightnings thicker flashed,—
Earth rocked beneath the thunders. To the walls
Hasted the Assyrians,—toward their camp the Medes.

But Jerimoth, and furious Zimri, still,
With horsemen and with chariots not a few,
The flying rear pursued. Them met, at length,
Arbaces ; and their vengeful frenzy stayed.
'Twixt either host all dreadless as he rode,—
The fierce assailants ever driving back,
The routed cheering,—him the furious chiefs
Beheld, and, loudly shouting, toward him rushed :
One in his chariot, one on his mailed steed,
Together rushed they. He, while yet far off,—
For the bright lightnings, ever and anon,
To sun-light glare the solid darkness changed,—
The chiefs descrying, in his chariot stood ;

And, his spear poising, bade his charioteer
Against them drive. A gleaming lance on high
Shaking, came Zimri,—and a javelin
Of flaming brass, in his uplifted hand,
The horseman wielded. All at once rushed on ;
And both the charioteers their coursers urged
To desperate shock. But, ere they met, died out
The lightning torches, and thick blackness fell—
Blackness abrupt and deep. Darkling they rushed :—
Wheel 'gainst wheel grinding out a sudden fire,
Like tempest they shot by ;—nor either chief,
In that intense obscure, against his foe
The spear could hurl. But Jerimoth his steed
Rapidly turned, and, by the chariot's rush,
Tracked through the night his foe : and Abner, too,
His horses curbing, for a second shock
The car wheeled round. Then flamed the heavens anew
With trembling splendour. Jerimoth the steeds,
Before him a brief space, just turning, saw ;
And, aiming, hurled his dart. No arm was his
For idle threatening : on the thigh it struck
The startled Mede ; and through the thick mail pierced ;
And pierced the flesh. But he, unheeding, plucked
The weapon from the wound, and, rising, hurled

With force gigantic his tremendous spear ;—
Then, like a lion by the hunters galled,
In the same moment from the chariot leaped,
His huge axe wielding.

Through the courser's mail
Burst, with loud crash, the spear ; and in his chest,
Deep buried, stood. Without a groan he fell :
Bent his strong knees, and rolled upon the earth :
At trumpet-summons never more to start ;
Beneath his rider never more to bound,
And glory in the battle. Down he dropped,
Heavily rolling ; and his mighty limbs
In the last death-spasm stretched.

But Jerimoth,
From the fallen steed, light as a deer, upsprang,—
His sword drew forth,—and, shouting, toward the Mede
Frantickly rushed. Then, on the same red couch,
Rider and steed together soon had slept,
But darkness, to preserve him, fell again,
And baulked the fatal blow. With arms prepared,
Both chiefs a moment stood,—the fitful light
Anxiously waiting ;—but the Assyrian's heart,

Brave as he was, misgave him, standing there
Singly to that invincible arm exposed ;
And, in his breast communing, thus he said.

“ Why pause I now, and let the moment pass
That steps ’twixt me and fate?—What hope have I
From this gigantic force with life to ’scape ?
Who yet hath vanquished him ? who, harmless, crossed
His weapon in the battle?—Once that axe,
Death menacing, above my head hath gleamed,
And I have ’scaped ;—but, madly, yet again
Shall I invite destruction?—No ! away !
From greater strength the strongest may retire,
Nor play the coward.”

Briefly pondering thus,
With silent step, rapidly back he drew,
The contest shunning,—and toward the car
Of Zimri sped ;—for him far off he heard,
Above the thunder peals and roaring wind,
With headlong fury driving through the night,
And on Arbaces calling. Then his voice
Raised he, and cried aloud ; “ Stay, Zimri, stay,—
A moment pause, and let me mount the car ;

That, both together, we once more may try
The fortune of the field."

Him Zimri heard ;
And stayed the coursers. To the chariot then
Leaped Jerimoth ; and toward their hated foe,
With lances raised, together on they drove.

Searching the field, him, from his car apart,
They soon beheld, and seeking who approached.
"Where art thou?" cried the Mede,—“thou mighty
one,—

Where art thou Jerimoth? I wait thee here,—
Where art thou fled, thou thunder-bolt of war?
Where is thy strength concealed?"

Calling thus,
He heard not that the car was drawing nigh ;
And right toward him driven. For Zimri thus
To Joab spake, his furious charioteer,
And comrade fit,—“Now Joab, take thou heed
That he escape not. Guide the horses well
That they may trample him ; or that the wheels
May dash him down. Grasp with both hands the reins ;—

The frantick steeds are wearied now, and tamed,
And will obey the rule. On ! let them go ! ”

That hearing, Joab to his steeds the reins
Up threw—and away, with the speed of the wind,
Right toward the Mede they rushed.

Yet he their tramp,

Amid the din, heard not. From the slain horse
Drawing the lance he stood : nor Abner saw
The coming danger,—toward the flying host
Looking afar ;—but, turning suddenly—
For the rush and the trampling came to his ear—
Arbaces, close upon him, saw the steeds—
And the loud madman’s laugh of Zimri heard,
Who him full surely underneath the hoofs
Deemed trampled then. But, at a bound, he sprang
From the path of the horses aside :—their breath
Blew hot in his ear ;—his shoulder with foam
Was white ;—like the sweep of the storm they passed.
Even in the instant, with his battle-axe,
A giant blow, unknowing where, dealt he :
On the rushing spokes the rushing weapon struck,—

The wheels were brass,—the spokes were bars of brass,—
But they broke, or bowed, that the crazed chariot now
Rocked heavily ;—and, ere the charioteer
His furious steeds could stay, with dreadful clash,
Fell to the earth.

Unharm'd rose Jerimoth ;
But Zimri senseless lay, and Joab,—flung,
With violence, on the ground.

Like lions loosed,
Away with the shattered car the coursers flew,
Ploughing the earth. They, at the break of day,
Nigh to the city gates, all white with foam,
Trembling and weak, were found ;—but, of the car,—
The broken beam excepted,—nought remained.

Above his senseless fellows, Jerimoth
Silently stood, and, of the dreadful Mede,
The coming waited :—but, their overthrow
Unknowing, from the slaughtered steed his spear
In haste Arbaces drew, and to his car
Lightly upspringing, for new strife prepared.

Expecting thus, long stood he : but no sound
 Gave signal of their coming ; nor his eye,
 In the bright gleams, at distance or at hand,
 Aught of their car beheld. To Abner then,—
 “ Turn now the steeds ;—whatever stays them thus,—
 Whether new aid they seek, or safe retreat,—
 Not longer may I tarry ; for the host
 Is distant far, and in the camp will be
 Wild havoc, uncontrolled.”—

That said, they went ;
 Through the uncertain darkness cautiously
 The horses guiding.

Nor the Assyrians long
 Upon the field remained ; for Jerimoth,—
 Short space away,—two friendly cars beheld,
 Slowly returning ; and his voice sent forth,
 And summoned them. Amazed, and giddy still,
 Yet all unharmed, into the chariot then
 Zimri and Joab rose : but Jerimoth
 With young Talmai in the other sat ;
 And communcd of the battle.

Toward their camp
Still flew the Medes; the Assyrians through their gates,—
Through every wide-flung gate in haste rushed they;
For still the thunders roared,—the tempest howled,—
And the bright bolts came down. At every flash,
Outflamed the mighty city,—her huge towers
And palaces,—her walls gigantic, thronged
With gazing myriads;—flamed out all the plain,—
Chariots, and horse—plumes—banners—gleaming arms—
And multitudes as of the ocean waves.

END OF THE SIXTH BOOK.

NOTES.



NOTES.

I HAD, in the course of such reading as I thought necessary for my work, made numerous memorandums of notes, which might, I thought, be illustrative of the subject, or which might, at the least, offer to the attention of the reader a pleasing diversion.

The volume is, however, quite bulky enough *, and I shall consequently suppress all but a few which seem the most immediately pertinent to the matter.

The work in which I have found condensed the greatest portion of information relative to Assyrian story, is the "Universal History." There may be others far more comprehensive and satisfactory, but I have not had the fortune to meet with them.

From this work I shall extract a brief account of the event upon which the poem is grounded.

Nineveh is said to have been built by Ninus on his return from a successful war. To his throne succeeded Semiramis, his widow,—who, towards the close of her life, surrendered it to their son Ninyas. By him was set that example of indolence and vicious effeminacy which is said to have been imitated by the long train of

* At the time when this passage was written, I had prepared, and intended to publish with the poem, a preface which would have occupied perhaps seventy or eighty pages. This preface I have been advised to omit; and the volume is consequently small enough to permit the addition of such notes, if I had time to prepare them for the press.

monarchs that intervened betwixt him and the overthrow of the empire under Sardanapalus. The following passage is extracted from the brief account of the Assyrian Empire contained in the fourth volume of the Universal History. The reader who is curious to know how little is to *be known* of the mighty Assyrian city would do well to consult the book.

“Ninyas succeeded his mother Semiramis, and taking neither after father nor mother, he chose to enjoy himself in peace; and, indeed, there must have been a necessity for it, if his parents had done all that report says of them. He could make no war upon any that were not either his subjects or vassals. As for India, which alone was free from his yoke, a war there had been sufficiently experienced to be very impracticable and absolutely dangerous. Having therefore nothing to do abroad, he locked himself up in his palace, unseen by any but his eunuchs and concubines, and contracted such a habit of sloth and vice, as has tainted his memory to all succeeding generations. However, he was not so supinely negligent, as totally to neglect his interest and security. It was a custom with him, every year, to levy an army, by a certain proportion of men out of each province, under their respective generals, while he appointed such governors over the several parts of his dominions as he could most safely confide in. This army served a year in the city, (and about it, we may suppose) and was then relieved by another, raised in the same manner; and the former, having taken an oath of fidelity to him, were permitted to depart each to the place of his abode. By this step of policy it was, he thought, that he might best keep his subjects in awe and order; and, at the same time, prevent any disturbance from his officers, who, having scarce time to be at all known to their soldiers, could have it the less in their power to aspire at any thing to his prejudice. All this he concerted to secure himself from insults and rebellion, while he wallowed in lasciviousness within the walls of his palace, in which he was an unworthy example to his successor after him;

reserving himself from the eyes of men, as something more than mortal.

“After this rate was it that all his successors reigned in the great empire of Assyria; so that they, it seems, have left little or nothing to be recorded of them, except that they lived and died in their palace at Nineveh; and hence it is we must abruptly proceed to the very last of them.

“Sardanapalus exceeded all his predecessors in sloth and luxury. He sunk into such a depth of depravity, that, as far as he could, he changed his very sex and nature; he clothed himself as a woman; he spun amidst the companies of his concubines; he painted his face, and decked himself out with all manner of enticements, and every way behaved more lewdly than the most lascivious harlot; he imitated the voice of a woman, and buried himself in the filth of an unbounded sensuality. Under this wretch, as represented*, it

* A man of pleasure and lewdness he may have been, and doubtless was, it being impossible to think otherwise of monarchs of this sort, as experience teaches us, and [for the proof of which we need go no farther than Constantinople, to take a view of the great Turk; but nevertheless he may have been a man, who, at some intervals, minded business; such a man we are told he was, for he is said to have built Tarsus and Anchiale in one day; in testimony of which he had this inscription on his tomb, “Sardanapalus, the son of Anacyn-daraxis, built Tarsus and Anchiale in one day; but now is dead.” This is a grave epitaph and might befit any prince, but we find it varied a little to his disadvantage; for, instead of the last three words, we have this addition to his magnificent exploit of having built these two cities in a day, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for the rest is not worth the snap of a finger;” which was signified by his statue here, in the act of snapping its fingers. This monument and statue is said not to have been far from Anchiale. A modern author supposes the same inscription and statue to have been at the other city Tarsus, where St. Paul was born, and thinks the Apostle alludes thereto, when he writes, “Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die.” However, there seems to be such incoherence between the former part of this inscription and the latter, that we

was, that the Assyrian monarchy came to ruin. He grew odious to his subjects about him, and, as should seem, particularly to Arbaces the Mede, and Belesis the Babylonian. Belesis was not only a captain, but a famous priest and a great astrologer, and by the rules of his art he took on him, as is said, to assure Arbaces, a man of valour and prudence, 'that he should dethrone Sardanapalus, and become lord of all his dominions.' Arbaces hearkened to his friend, and promised him the chief place over Babylon, if things should happen to answer his prediction; and, fully possessed that he was to be as Belesis had foretold of him, he cultivates particular intimacies with the other governors of the provinces then at Nineveh, and begins to affect popularity; and therein succeeds to his wish. But, above all, he endeavours to get sight of the emperor, that he might behold his course and manner of life, and describe him accordingly. This he brings to pass, by the prevalence of a golden cup which he presented to an eunuch, who introduced him into the presence. Arbaces saw him, and, conceiving the highest contempt of him, was more and more encouraged to rely on his Chaldean friend, and, im-

know not what to think of it; there is no manner of relation between the action recorded, and the reflection that ensues. In the first, indeed, there is a becoming gravity throughout, and a persuasive to virtue and humility, by representing, that even the mighty king, who could build two cities in a day, was equally mortal with the rest of his kind; but the latter is merely calculated to encourage idleness and vice,—“eat, drink, and be merry, the rest is not worth caring for.” If this was anywhere the genuine inscription, it must have been in derision of him after his death, and upon a presumption that he was the idle, effeminate creature he is painted. Callisthenes writes, there were two Sardanapaluses, the one a bold, the other an effeminate, man. Others do the same, as we shall have occasion to observe hereafter. Suidas, who gives this inscription according to the last of the two copies above, thinks it may belong to the masculine Sardanapalus, though with what propriety we may consider a little farther.

patient to effect their purpose, Arbaces disposes the Medes and Persians to an open revolt; and Belesis does the same with the Babylonians; and, in short, the matter was disclosed to the king of Arabia.

“ The year of duty was now expired, and fresh troops arrived to relieve those who had served it; but the Persians, Medes, and Babylonians, assisted by the Arabians, came not with design to guard Sardanapalus; their intent was to subvert the empire. Their number altogether amounted to 400,000 men, and being all combined together in one camp, a council of war was called, to deliberate upon what was best to be done. Sardanapalus, apprised of this revolt, resolved to stifle it in its infancy; and led out the troops of the other provinces against the confederated rebels; and, coming to a battle with them, he entirely routed them, and with great slaughter pursued them to certain mountains about seventy stades from the city of Nineveh. The rebels, however, drew out again to fight the emperor, who, just before the action began, caused proclamation to be made of a reward of 200 talents of gold for the man who should kill Arbaces the Mede, and twice that sum, together with the government of Media, to the man who should produce him alive; and the same was proclaimed concerning Belesis the Babylonian. This proclamation being made without any effect, a second battle was fought, and the rebels were slaughtered, and put to flight towards the hills. This victory had assured Sardanapalus in his throne, had it not been for the obstinacy of Belesis, who persisted in it, that the gods would certainly smile on them, and crown their labours and perseverance with success in the end; thereby reviving their drooping spirits, who in despair had called a council, the result of which was, that they should disperse, and every man return to his home. They fight a third battle, and Sardanapalus, victor, as twice before, drives them into the mountains of Babylon, though Arbaces did that day all that man could do, and was now forced to retreat considerably wounded.

“Sardanapalus had now certainly put an end to the war*, if Belshis, who had been all night in deep consult with the stars, had not, with all imaginable assurance, persuaded them the next morning, that if they kept together but five days longer, they would be joined and supported by unexpected assistance; for that the gods had so signified to him by the aspect of the heavens: he entreated them, therefore, to stay but so many days, and in the mean time to place a confidence in the gods. Wrought on to wait the event, and the time expired, sudden advice was brought of a mighty power at hand, sent to the king from Bactria. Arbaces, upon this, despatched the most resolute and expeditious men in his army, with orders to prevail on the Bactrians to revolt, either by fair means or foul. Liberty was the bait to allure them; and by degrees, from officer to soldier, it prevailed, and the Bactrians joined Arbaces; a transaction unknown to Sardanapalus, who, presuming he had now nothing to fear, was returned to his usual way of life, and preparing for an extraordinary sacrifice, and a high festival for the entertainment of his victorious army.

“In the meantime the negligence and riot in the imperial camp was conveyed to the ears of Arbaces, who, in consequence thereof, fell suddenly on them in the night, made his way into the camp, and drove out Sardanapalus and all his army, with a great slaughter,

* It must be confessed a little strange, that so degenerated a creature should have the courage and ability thus to defend himself against these revolters, who should have been of much greater experience and capacity than himself. Indeed, according to what this author and most others say of him, he could have understood nothing in the world relating to war, or almost any thing else peculiar to men; and yet, being forced into the field, we find him behaving and defending himself as well as if he had been Ninus, or even Semiramis herself. From this dissimilitude of Sardanapalus from himself, it is likely we have the two mentioned by Callisthenes in the note above, Sardanapalus the warrior, and Sardanapalus the woman. This, as every thing of our own, we offer as conjecture only.

which continued almost to the gates of the city. Whereupon the king commits the care and conduct of his army to Salamenes, his brother-in-law, undertaking to defend the city in person. His forces were twice defeated; once at some distance, and once under the walls of the city, when Salamenes fell, and almost all his army was cut off, and forced into the river, which was tinctured with the gore of the slain for a long way.

“Sardanapalus was now closely besieged: many other nations, now eager for liberty, revolted to the confederates; and, perceiving things at so desperate a pass, he sent away his three sons and two daughters, with a very great treasure, into Paphlagonia, where one Cotta, a particular friend of his, was governor, and issued out orders to all parts of his empire to come in to his assistance, and prepare for a siege. But though his situation may seem to have been quite deplorable, he, it seems, did not succumb, fully possessed with the notions of a prophecy, that Nineveh could never be taken, till the river became her enemy, which, according to his conclusion, amounting to an impossibility, he looked upon himself as secure, how great and imminent soever the dangers might be that threatened him.

“While Sardanapalus pleased himself with this imagination, the confederates, elated by what they had done, considered their work as completed, though they, in those early days, could make no impression on such walls, ignorant as they were of the engines afterwards invented to expedite undertakings of this sort. Sardanapalus having taken care to be well stored with what was necessary to enable him to hold out for a long time, the confederates sat two years before the city without any visible effect; but, in the third year, the river, swelled by unusual rains, came up to the city, and overflowed a great length, no less than twenty stades of the wall: The unfortunate Sardanapalus, now sensible of the completion of what had been foretold of the river's enmity to the city, had no farther room for hope, and dreading to fall into the hands of the

enemy, retired into his palace, in a court of which he caused a vast pile of wood to be raised; and, heaping upon it all his gold, and silver, and royal apparel, and at the same time inclosing his eunuchs and concubines in an apartment within the pile, he set fire thereto, and so destroyed himself and the rest; which the rebels hearing, entered the city by the breach, and became lords of the place. The inhabitants were treated with great humanity, though the great and mighty city of Nineveh itself was laid level with the ground. And thus ended the Assyrian empire, subverted by the Medes and Babylonians, after it had, according to our author Ctesias, subsisted no less than 1400 years."

OF the present appearance of this "great and mighty city of Nineveh" we have a picture in the account of Mr. Buckingham, who lately visited the spot on which it stood. Had I seen this book before I had designed my poem, I should probably have attended to his topography. From the maps of the country, in some part of which Nineveh was *supposed* to have been situated, I had concluded that it stood in the midst of an immense plain; and in this way I have accordingly represented it; and, under that view, have constructed much of the action of the poem. Mr. Buckingham asserts that there was a range of mountains close to the eastern side of the city. Not, however, considering this fact to be absolutely established; nor my error, if such it be, a very important one, I have not thought it necessary to make any alteration in my first design. To those readers who have not perused his book, the passage may perhaps afford interest, and I therefore extract it.

"All things being arranged for my journey with the Turkish Tartars, from Mosul to Bagdad, I received intimation from the Tartar-Aga, or chief of these couriers, that our horses would be ready at nine o'clock this morning, and that, on no consideration, would any delay beyond that hour be permitted. As I was up,

however, before the sun, I procured the use of a horse and guide from my Christian entertainer, and set out on a visit to the ruins of Nineveh, which are scattered along the eastern bank of the Tigris. Descending through the town to the river, we crossed it, over a bridge of boats, which was just 150 horse-paces in length. The boats were badly constructed; and, not being fastened together in the most secure manner, the whole bridge was set in motion by the least agitation of the water. They were moored, head and stern, by iron chains, and were sharp at each end. The rate of the current in mid-channel seemed at present not to exceed two miles an hour; but it was said by all, that this was the slowest rate at which it ran, and that it sometimes possessed three times its present rapidity. The water was nowhere deeper than from three to four fathoms; and was of a yellow muddy colour throughout; though it soon became clear by being suffered to rest, and was at all seasons fine, and sweet to the taste. We went from hence towards the north-east, and passing over a stone bridge of Mohammedan work, thrown across a small stream, which discharges itself into the Tigris, came in about an hour to the principal mounds which are thought to mark the site of the ancient Nineveh. There are four of these mounds, disposed in the form of a square; and these, as they show neither bricks, stones, nor other materials of building, but are in many places overgrown with grass, resemble the mounds left by intrenchments and fortifications of ancient Roman camps. The longest of these mounds runs nearly north and south, and consists of several ridges of unequal height, the whole appearing to extend for four or five miles in length. There are three other distinct mounds, which are all near to the river, and lie in the direction of east and west. The first of these, counting from the southward, is the one called 'Nebbé Yunus,' having a tomb on it, which is thought to contain the ashes of the prophet Jonas, and a small village collected round it; the next to the northward is called Tal Hermoosh, which is not marked by any striking pecu-

liarity ; and the third is the one we first ascended, and which, by way of distinction, from its regularity and height, is called Tal Ninoa, or the Hill of Nineveh. In order to mark the place of this last with the greater precision, I took from its centre a set of bearings, by compass, of the principal objects in view. There are appearances of mounds and ruins extending for several miles to the southward, and still more distinctly seen to the northward of this, though both are less marked than the mounds of the centre. The space between these is a level plain, over every part of the face of which, broken pottery, and the other usual *debris* of ruined cities, are still seen scattered about. If it were true, as asserted by Strabo, and other early writers, that Nineveh was larger than Babylon, it might be considered to have been the largest city that ever existed in the world, and one might even credit the assertion, that ‘ Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey,’ not in circumference, as it has been assumed, but in length, since Jonah did not begin to proclaim the denunciations of God against it, until he had entered the city a day’s journey, which would then have been its further extreme, if three days only had been the extent of its circuit. But we are furnished with its actual dimensions in stadia, which enables us to compare how far its comparative magnitude was greater than that of Babylon or not. Herodotus assigns to this last a square of 480 stadia, or a circumference of sixty miles, counting fifteen miles for each of its sides, reckoning the stadium at its highest standard of eight to a mile. Diodorus Siculus gives the dimensions of Nineveh as 150 stadia in length, and ninety stadia in breadth, or about nineteen miles in front along the river, and eleven and a quarter in breadth, from the river to the mountains, estimating the stadium at the same standard of value. There was, it is true, a greater length in the city of Nineveh ; but, from its more confined breadth, the space actually included within the limits given was somewhat less than that of Babylon. It may, however, be admitted to claim for itself a higher-

antiquity, since the second great capital of the Assyrian empire did not begin to flourish until this, its first metropolis, whose origin mounts up to the period just succeeding the deluge, was abandoned to decay. The nature of the ground here determines, with sufficient precision, what must have been the local features of its site, and confirms the accuracy of the historian, who describes it as of an oblong form. From the extent of the plain of Babylon, that city might have spread itself out to any given length, its limits being circumscribed only on the west, by the existence of marshes and lakes there. Nineveh too might have stretched a front along the river of any extent, but its breadth was absolutely fixed within ten or twelve miles, that being the whole extent of the plain on the eastern bank of the Tigris, from the river to the range of Jebel Makloube, the mountains which form its eastern boundary. As far as I could perceive, from our elevated point of view, on the highest summit of Tal Ninoa, there were mounds of ruins similar to those near us, but less distinctly marked, as far as the eye could reach to the northward; and the plain to the eastward of us, or between the river and the mountains, had a mixture of large brown patches, like heaps of rubbish, seen at intervals, scattered over a cultivated soil. . . .

. Nineveh is said to have been surrounded by walls that were 100 feet in height, and of a sufficient breadth for three chariots to pass along it together abreast, as well as to have been defended by 1500 towers along these walls, which were each of them 200 feet high. If the walls of Babylon, however, which were comparatively of so much more modern erection, are thought to have left no trace remaining, those of Nineveh may well have totally disappeared. From the height on which we stood, extending our view to a considerable distance in every direction, we could not certainly perceive any marked delineation of one great outline; but mounds and smaller heaps of ruins were scattered widely over the plain, sufficient to prove that the site of the original city occupied a vast extent, notwithstanding that some

of the latest visitors to this place have thought that the remains were confined to the few mounds of the centre only. Macdonald Kinner conceived that the ruins at this place were those of Ninus, the city which succeeded to Nineveh, and not those of Nineveh itself. It is evident, however, that the writer spoke only of the central mounds; as he expressly states that the circumference of all the remains he saw did not exceed four miles, and very inexplicably observes, that he saw neither *stones nor rubbish of any kind*, though the mounds are naturally altogether formed of the last.

“ If the temple of Araske, in which Sennacherib was slain, after returning from his Egyptian war, when all the armour of his soldiers was gnawed to pieces by mice, in one night, at Pelusium, and a hundred and eighty-five thousand of his army, with all their captains and generals, were carried off by a pestilence, before the walls of Jerusalem, in another, was equal in extent, either to the temple of Priapus at Thebes, or of Belus at Babylon, the mounds here forming an oblong square, nearly in the centre of the city, might perhaps mark the site of that building; but I remember no particular details regarding the size or form of that edifice, which could assist in the elucidation of this question. From among the ruins of Nineveh, many antique gems, intaglios, and hieroglyphic devices on stone, have been dug up; of some of which, drawings and descriptions are given in the ‘*Mines de l’Orient*,’ by Mr. Rich, of Bagdad; and not long since, a large stone was found here, inscribed all over with sculptures and unknown characters, which, falling into the hands of the Turks, was by them broken to pieces and destroyed. On descending from the mound of Tal Ninoa, we walked across the level space included between it and the other principal mounds near the river, and found the whole extent of it covered with broken pottery, of a very coarse quality, and in general but slightly ribbed, though evidently of the ancient kind. In riding across this plain, we passed a small stream, called ‘*Mall Rosa*,’ or the Water of Rosa, which comes from the eastern mountains, and

passing by the foot of Tal Hermoosh, discharges itself into the Tigris. In this hill, or large mound, excavations have been made, seemingly with a view to ascertain of what material it was formed, and probably with a hope of being able to extract burnt bricks from thence for building, as is done from mounds of ruins at Babylon; but there was here no appearance of such brick-work; the whole, from length of time, and the nature of the materials, having become condensed into one solid mass. As we passed by the mound, called 'Tal Nebbé Yunus,' I examined with more attention, an opening recently made on its northern side, and here I saw, most distinctly, a section of masonry. The bricks were apparently sun dried, and in dimensions two spans long, and one span deep; they were of a very coarse kind, and were united by layers of common mortar. The supposed tomb of the prophet Jonah, which stands on the top of the hill, and has collected a tolerably large village about it, is in the hands of Mahommedans. It appeared to me so like the common tombs of saints, seen all over the East, that, pressed as I was for time to return to Mousul, I did not go up to visit it. As we went down from hence, by the eastern bank of the river, towards the bridge of boats, which goes across the Tigris, we passed again by the stone bridge, over a rivulet coming from the eastward, till it empties itself, close by this, into the river; and remarked, that it has fifteen pointed arches, but of very inferior masonry. In approaching Mousul from the eastward on our return, its appearance was much more interesting than that offered on entering it from the west. From hence, it appeared to extend itself along the western bank of the river, for at least three miles in length. The houses seemed to be thickly crowded, though the mosques were not proportionately numerous. The centre of the town, standing on more elevated ground than its northern and southern extremes, shewed the minaret of Nour-el-Deen, which rises from the great mosque to considerable advantage. The view of the country, to the north of the town, offered nothing of peculiar interest; but to

the south, the Pasha's gardens, and some little villas seen through the trees, made a highly picturesque appearance. On reaching the opposite bank of the river, we re-entered Mousul, and going up through the 'Sookh el Rhiale,' or the Horse Bazār, where I noticed the only minaret of stone I had seen in the city, we came to the 'Konauk Tātar Agasi,' or Head-quarters of the Couriers, near the palace of the Pasha, where the horses for our journey were just saddling, while the Tartars were cracking their whips, parading about in heavy boots, abusing the grooms and horse-keepers, and in short, giving themselves all the airs which are common among the same class of people, including post-boys, coachmen, &c. in England. We mounted here, and set out on our journey from Mousul to Bagdad, soon after nine o'clock, the Tartars being the same Jonas, and Ali, who had come alone from Diarbekr, and with our caravan across the Desert of Sinjar; they being charged with packets from the British Ambassador at Constantinople, to Mr. Rich at Bagdad. As our horses were now fresh and good, and our saddles and furniture put in order during our short stay at Mousul, we set out with high spirits, and the prospect of an expeditious journey at least; Ali and myself going on before, and leaving Jonas to overtake us. After crossing the Tigris, over the bridge of boats before described, we travelled in a southern direction, receding gradually from the eastern banks of the river, as the stream made here a course of about south south west. For the first two hours, during which the whole distance traversed was about ten miles, we continued among hillocks and mounds, which had all the appearance of being formed from the wreck of former buildings. It resembled in this respect, the indefinite remains and rubbish seen on the sites of other ruined cities, as Alexandria, Memphis, Sais, and Tanis, in Egypt; and left no doubt, in my own mind, of its marking the extent of ancient Nineveh, to be fully equal to the dimensions given of it by the early geographers and historians."

“ *Look down upon us from your spheres of light,
Bright Ministers of the Invisible.* ” &c. Page 19.

The Eastern nations were star worshippers: but their notions were not without somewhat of sublimity. They believed that there was one God supreme over all things, and that the stars were his ministers. The following quotation is from the *Universal History*, Vol. iv. p. 258.

“ The religion and boasted learning of the Babylonians are so blended together, that we hardly know how to separate them into distinct heads; for the Chaldees, properly so called, were not only their priests, but also their learned men; whose whole science seems to have been subservient to the purposes of superstition and infatuation. The Chaldeans, as distinguished from the Babylonians, were in some sort distinct from these people, and rather more so than the clergy were from the laity with us. These Chaldeans were as much revered in their country, as the Egyptian priests were in theirs; and are said to have enjoyed the same rank and degree in the kingdom. They were wholly devoted to the business of their superstitious religion, and pretended to prophecy, and the gift of prediction by the rules of augury, the flight of birds, and the inspection of victims; and professed the interpretation of dreams, and to explain all the extraordinary accidents and phænomena of nature, as portending good or evil to men or nations, and were thought by their enchantments and invocations to affect mankind either with happiness or with misery. Having by their situation been early addicted to celestial observations, they, instead of conceiving as they ought to have done concerning the omnipotence of the Creator and Mover of the heavenly bodies, and of being confirmed in a due belief and practice of what had been handed by tradition down to men by Noah and his sons, fell into the impious error of esteeming them as gods, and the immediate governors of the world, in subordination, however, to the Deity, who was invisible but by his works and the

effects of his power. They concluded then, that God had created the stars and great luminaries for the governance of the world, that he had accordingly placed them on high, and made them partakers with him, and substituted them his ministers; and that it was but just and natural they should be praised, and honoured, and extolled; and that it was even the will of God they should be magnified, and feared, and worshipped; just as a king desires his servants should be respected in honour of himself.

“Persuaded of this they began to build temples, or sacella, to the stars, to sacrifice to them, to praise them, and to bow down before them, that through their means they might obtain the favour and good will of God, so that they esteemed them as mediators between God and them. For that there was a necessity for a mediatory office between God and man, is observed to have been a notion that generally obtained among mankind from the beginning.

“Conscious of their own meanness, vileness, and impurity, and unable to conceive how it was possible for them of themselves alone to have any access to the all-holy, all-glorious, and supreme Governor of all things, they considered him as too high, and too pure, and themselves as too low, and too polluted for such a converse; and therefore concluded that there must be a mediator, by whose means only they could make any address to him, and by whose intercession alone any of their petitions could be accepted of. But no clear revelation being then made of the mediator, whom God had appointed, because as yet he had not been manifested unto the world, they took upon them to address themselves unto him by mediators of their own choosing; and their notion of the sun, moon, and stars being, that they were the tabernacles or habitations of intelligences, which animated those orbs in the same manner as the soul of man animates his body, and were the causes of all their motions, and that those intelligences were of a middle nature between God and them, they thought these the properest beings to become the mediators between God and them; and therefore the planets being

the nearest to them of all the heavenly bodies, and generally looked on to have the greatest influence on this world, they made choice of them in the first place for their *Gods mediators*, who were to mediate for them with the supreme God, and procure from him the mercies and favours which they prayed for, and accordingly they directed divine worship to them as such; and here began all the idolatry that has been practised in the world.”—Prideaux’s Connection, Part I. Book 3.

“ *But the king*

In the pavilion with his concubines

Feasted all day, beneath a canopy

Of purple, starred with emeralds and gold

And every costly gem. From ruby cups,

And crystal bowls, and goblets of fine gold

The sparkling wine they quaffed,” &c.

Page 49.

Of the immense wealth of the East, that wealth, at least, which consists in store of gold and gems, there is, in all the historians, evidence sufficient to justify a poet in even more extravagant descriptions than any that I have given.

“ Now behold in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver,” &c.—1 Chronicles, xxii. 14.

“ Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal.”—1 Chronicles, xxix. 4.

In the feast of Ahasuerus we are told, that “ the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold,” &c.—Esther, i. 6, 7.

“ Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold whose height

was three score cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits."—Daniel, iii. 1.

Holofernes was reposing himself under a rich canopy of purple, gold, emeralds, and other precious stones, when he heard that Judith waited without.

"And many a horseman spurring hastily." Page 71.

After this was written I hesitated whether spurs were in use at the period, and was about to alter the line. I afterwards recollected to have met with the word in Cowper's Iliad, and suffered it to remain. Pandarus, after he has wounded Diomed with an arrow, thus exclaims:—

"Now Trojans ply the spur; now face your foes."

Iliad, B. v. l. 117.

*"Then, placing on his brow the golden round,
Burning with gems," &c.*

Page 91.

"And David took the crown of their king (Hadarezer) from off his head, and found it to weigh a talent of gold: and there were precious stones in it."—1 Chron. xx. 2.

*"Brass was his helm,
With gold thick plated, and his shield was gold."*

Page 139.

"And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadarezer, and brought them to Jerusalem."—1 Chron. xviii. 7.

"And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred shekels of gold went to one target.

"And he made three hundred shields of beaten gold: three pounds of gold went to one shield."—1 Kings, x. 16, 17.

“ *Michael, have ready thy two thousand cars—
And, with thy fifty thousand horsemen, thou
Nebaioth follow,*” &c.

Page 142.

“ *From out the foot,
His ten score thousand men let Joshua take,*” &c. Page 142.

If any one should object to the immensity of the armies that I have brought together, I can only refer him to the historians, who have gone far beyond me: should he object to the multitude of my chariots, I will produce authority to justify myself: should he dislike the formal enumeration that I have frequently given, I must remind him that the sacred writers have set me the example so perpetually as to render this mode of description almost a part of the *costume* proper for a work founded, in part, upon Bible history.

“ And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.”—Judges, iv. 3.

“ And Abijah set the battle in array with an army of valiant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men: Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, being mighty men of valour.”—2 Chronicles, xiii. 3.

“ But Jeroboam caused an ambushment to come about behind them: so they were before Judah, and the ambushment was behind them.”—Ibid. 13.

“ And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter: so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men.”—Ibid. 17.

“ And Asa had an army of men that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand: and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and four score thousand: all these were mighty men of valour. And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with a host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots.”—2 Chronicles, xiv. 8, 9.

“And when the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the children of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia, and out of Syria-maachah, and out of Zobah. So they hired thirty and two thousand chariots,” &c.—1 Chronicles, xix. 6, 7.

“And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and a hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred three score and ten thousand men that drew sword. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them.”—1 Chronicles, xxi. 5, 6.

*“ High in the midst,
The splendid ensign, azure, silver-starred,
With diamond-sprinkled sun of burning gold,
Rayed with bright diamonds, to the fresh breeze
Rolled out its glorious hues.”* Page 150.

“The ensigns, or military standards of the star-worshipping nations were believed to have consisted of astral signs.”—Landseer’s Sabæan Researches, p. 311.

*“ Quick! my signet take :—
The rule of all the host is in thy hands.”* Page 175.

“And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.

“And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph’s hand.

“And he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.”—Genesis, xli.

The curious reader may find, upon the subject of ancient signets, ample information in Landseer’s Sabæan Researches.

*“ For through his mail
Burst with loud stroke the arrow of the Mede,
And in his heart stood fixed.”*

Page 202.

“ Here fell a brave man, Cleonymus, a Lacedemonian, who was wounded in the side by an arrow that made its way through both his shield and his buff coat. Here also fell Basias, an Arcadian, whose head was pierced quite through with an arrow.”

“ The barbarians were very skilful archers: their bows were near three cubits in length, and their arrows above two. When they discharged their arrows they drew the string by pressing upon the lower part of the bow with their left foot. These arrows pierced through the shields and corslets of our men, who, taking them up, made use of them instead of darts, by fixing thongs to them.”—Xenophon’s Expedition of Cyrus, Book 4.



THE
PLAGUE OF HAILSTONES.



THE
PLAGUE OF HAILSTONES.

“AND Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail; and the fire ran along upon the ground.”

EXODUS, ix. 23.

THE impious Monarch sat upon his throne,
Defying still the God of Israel.—
The sixth foul plague tormented yet the land,
Corroding boils and blains: age, sex, nor rank
Escaped. The hungry infant from the breast
Turned, sickening; and the mother from her child.
On the new bride the bridegroom stared aghast;
She upon him, and lifted up her hands,
As at a serpent. Israel's sons alone,—
So was the hand of God made manifest,—
Walked through the tainted air, and knew no spot.

But Pharaoh still was hardened in his pride,
And would not let the oppressed people go.—

Then the seventh time the chosen leader came,
 And spake unto the king. "O hard of heart!
 And blind in unbelief! not yet, seest thou,
 That Israel's God is Lord of all the earth?
 Six plagues have come on thee, and all the land,—
 Yea do ye stink with very loathsomeness,—
 Wilt thou yet strive against the living God?
 And wilt thou yet his chosen nation vex
 With stripes, and bondage, and task-masters hard?
 Or wilt thou let them go from out the land,
 That they may sacrifice unto their God;
 Even to Jehovah in the wilderness?"

The awful prophet ceased; and thus the king,—
 With brow like night, and eye-balls flashing fire,—
 Upstarting from his golden throne replied.
 "Slave and magician! no! they shall not go!—
 Who is your God, that I should be afraid
 And hearken to his voice?—I know him not,—
 Neither shall Israel go. The things thou didst,
 Did not our sorcerers also,—or in part—
 Even in thy sight?—yet prate they of their God?
 What art thou but a blacker sorcerer?
 Or who thy God but him they also serve?—

When from thy rod a living serpent came,
Cast they not also every man his rod
That turned into a serpent?—When to blood
Thy spells had changed the waters, played not they
The cunning trick as well?—And for thy frogs
Brought they not forth the loathsome reptiles too?—
And comest thou here to boast of Israel's God,—
Their God alone?—and say unto the king,
' Let go thy bondsmen now from out the land
That they may sacrifice unto the Lord?'—
Who then is Israel's God? I know him not—
And Israel shall not go.—And who art thou
That I should hearken thee, and lift not up
My hand to punish? Tell me whence thou art,
And show a sign that I may truly know
If your Jehovah be the God indeed,
Israel his people, and his prophet thou."—

Then Moses lifted up his hands and spake.
" O ! harder than the millstone ! askest thou
A sign that God is God, and Israel
His people chosen? Six signs hast thou had,
Yet not believed ; and the seventh will see,
And harden yet thy heart, and heavier task

The groaning people, and not let them go,—
But, at the last, thyself shalt send them forth ;
And own, in tears, that Israel's God is God.
But hearken to me now, and I will tell
Both whence I come, and by what sign I know
That I indeed the prophet of the Lord
Am chosen to this work. On Horeb's mount,—
The holy hill,—my father Jethro's flocks
I led to pasture. Suddenly, behold !
A bush,—and in the midst a flame of fire ;
A fierce flame, yet the bush was unconsumed :
And in the fire the Angel of the Lord
Appeared unto me ! Trembling, I went back,
And turned aside, that I this wondrous sight
Might see, and why the bush was unconsumed.
But, from the fire, I heard the voice of God,
That called my name ; and, fearing, I replied—
' Here am I.'—Then He spake again, and said,
' Draw not nigh hither ; put thy shoes aside
From off thy feet, for where thou standest now
Is holy ground. I am thy father's God,—
The God of Abraham,—and Isaac's God,—
The God of Jacob.'—Then I hid my eyes,
Lest I should look upon the face of God.

And the Lord said, ' I surely have beheld
Th' afflictions of my people, and have heard
Their cry, by reason of their task-masters ;—
For I do know their sorrows ; and am come
From the Egyptians to deliver them,
And bring them from that land unto a land
Flowing with milk and honey. Therefore come,
And I will send thee unto Pharaoh now,
That thou my chosen people may'st bring forth,
The children of Israel, from Egyptian bonds.'

“ Then I bowed down, and said unto the Lord,
' Who am I that to Pharaoh I should go ?—
And to the men of Israel when I come,
And say unto them “ Lo! your fathers' God
Hath sent me to you,” if perchance they ask
“ What is his name ?” how shall I answer them ?’
Then spake the Almighty. ‘ I AM THAT I AM—
Thus to the children of Israel shalt thou say,—
“ I AM hath sent me to you,—the Lord God,—
Your father's God,—the God of Abraham,—
The God of Isaac,—and the God of Jacob,—
Even he hath sent me to you ;”—this my name
For ever, my memorial to all nations.

Go, gather now the elders of Israel,
And say to them, "The God of Abraham,
The God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,
Appeared unto me saying:—Surely I
Have seen that which is done to you in Egypt;
And I will bring you out from your affliction
Unto a land, a good land, and a large,
Flowing with milk and honey." Then go ye,—
Thou, and the elders,—to the king, and say,
"The Lord God of the Hebrews hath appeared
Unto us: we beseech thee let us go
A three days' journey in the wilderness,
That we may sacrifice unto the Lord."
But I am sure he will not let you go:—
And I will stretch out then my hand, and smite
Egypt with all my wonders in the midst
Whereof which I will do; and after that
The king shall let you go.' Then to the Lord
I answered, 'Surely they will not believe,
Nor hearken to my voice; for they will say—
Thou hast not seen the Lord.' Then unto me
God spake: 'Cast now thy rod upon the ground.'—
And, when I cast it, lo! it was a serpent!
And I fled from it.—But He spake again:—

‘ Put forth thy hand and take it.’—Then I stooped,
And caught the serpent, and it was a rod!—
Then said the Lord again : ‘ Put now thy hand
Into thy bosom. Then I put my hand
Into my bosom : when I took it out,
Behold ! my hand was leperous as snow !—
Then said the Lord, ‘ Put now again thine hand
Into thy bosom.’ Then I put my hand
Again into my bosom, and behold !
When I plucked forth my hand, it had become
Even as my other flesh ! Then said the Lord,
‘ Surely they may believe their fathers’ God,
The God of Abraham, and Isaac’s God,
The God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee !
And if they will not hearken to the voice
Of the first sign, yet in the second sign
They will believe : but if they still are deaf,
Then shalt thou take this rod into thy hand
Wherewith thou shalt do signs before the king.’—

“ And have I not done signs and wonders then?—
Yet art thou hardened still in unbelief,
And wilt not let the oppressed people go?—
Have I not turned your waters into blood ?

Covered the land with frogs? and changed to lice
The dust? and filled the air with swarms of flies?
All save the land of Goshen, where abide
The chosen race, the children of Israel?—
And didst thou not, O king! say, ‘Ye shall go;
Only intreat for me unto your God
That he may stay his hand’? And, after that,
Didst thou not harden still thy heart and say,
‘The people shall not go’? Then sent I not
A murrain on your cattle, that they died?
Horses, and asses, camels, oxen, sheep?—
But in the land of Goshen died there one?—
Last, sent I not this plague upon you all,
Boils, blains, and blotches upon man and beast,
That the land stinketh with your loathsomeness?—
And art thou hardened still, and proud of heart,—
And wilt not let the oppressed people go?”

Then with a stern, hoarse voice the king replied.
“Wily impostor! hence!—out of my sight!—
Think not with cunning lies to blind the king!—
Thee and thy boasted God of Israel
I do defy! haste, sorcerer! from my sight!—
I will not let the accursed people go;—

But will oppress them with a heavier hand,
And they shall cry unto their God in vain.”
He said, and started from his glittering throne,
And hurled his sceptre down.

Then Moses spake.

“Hardened and proud! the God of Israel
Again shall stretch his rod upon the land,
And thou *shalt* let the afflicted people go.—
Behold to-morrow, even about this time,
The Lord shall send a very grievous hail,
Such as in Egypt never hath been seen.
Send therefore now, and gather from the fields
Thy cattle, and thy sheep, and all thou hast:—
For upon every man and beast found there
The hail shall come, that they shall surely die.—
So shalt thou know that Israel’s God is God,
And shalt repent, and bid the people go.”
But yet the king was hardened in his heart,
And mocked at Moses and at Israel’s God.

Then on the morrow unto Moses spake
The Lord, and said, “Stretch forth thine hand toward
heaven,

That upon every man and beast, and herb,
Throughout the land of Egypt, may come hail."

Then Moses stretched forth his rod towards heaven,—
And o'er the sky came darkness, that the sun,
As with a furnace-smoke, quenched utterly.—
Blackness and death-like silence all the land
Made like a tomb: astonished, every tongue
Was mute, and every limb with terror shook.

But soon a sound far off was heard in heaven,
A sound as of a coming multitude,—
Horses and chariots,—rushing furiously ;—
Then, like a trumpet opening on the ear,
Came down a terrible and mighty wind.—
Wide scattering, fell anon, with heavy stroke,
As of a stone from a strong slinger's arm,
The solitary hail ;—dark fires at length
Amid the black clouds wandered to and fro,—
Earth shook, and heaven with terror seemed to quake,—
And all the plague was loosed.—The voice of God
Spake in ten thousand thunders: fire and hail
Shot, howling, down, and lightnings in a flood,
Mixed with the hail, and ran upon the ground :—

And with the hail, and thunder, and the fire,
A mighty wind, that the huge hailstones smote
Like rocks the quivering ground,—like shattering rocks,
Hurled from the mountain to the groaning plain,
Smoking and whirling, rushed the awful hail,—
Hailstones and fires, tempests and thunders mixed,
Fell on the land, that all the people cried,
And trembled at the anger of the Lord.
And every man, and every beast that stood
Within the fields, the hailstones smote and slew :
And every herb and every tree brake down
In all the land of Egypt.—But the sun
Shone in the fields of Goshen pleasantly ;—
Thunder, nor wind, nor fire, nor hailstones fell ;—
For there the sons of Israel abode,
The favoured people, chosen of the Lord.

Then Pharaoh, trembling, unto Moses sent,
And Aaron, and besought them bitterly.
“ Oh ! I have sinned ! righteous is the Lord,—
I, and my people wicked.—Haste ye now,
And pray unto your God that he will hold
His mighty thunderings, and his dreadful hail ;

And I will let the chosen people go,
And ye shall stay no longer."

Then to him
Spake Moses, saying, "When I shall be gone
Out of the city, I will spread my hands
Abroad unto the Lord, and he will stay
The thunder and the hail, and they shall cease;—
So may'st thou know that all the earth is His;
And that Jehovah is the God of Gods.—
But as for thee, and thine, I know that still
Ye will not fear the Lord, nor let us go."

Then Moses went from out the city straight,
And spread abroad his hands unto the Lord.

The thunders, and the fire, and hailstones ceased.

THE END.

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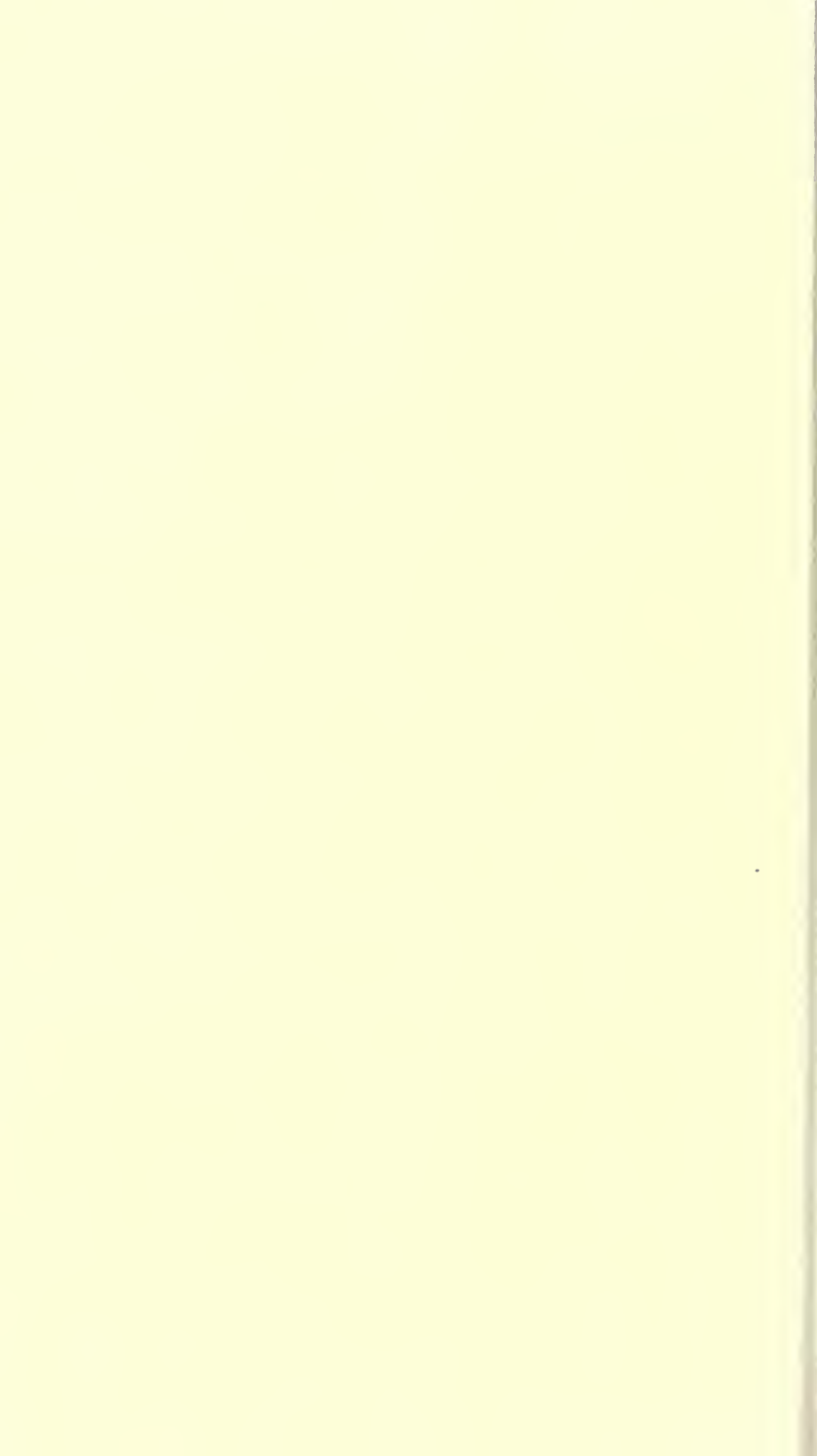
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